

PREACHING KINGDOM PARABLES IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT

A THESIS-PROJECT

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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To my loving spouse, my wonderful children and my parents, along with my spiritual family.

Thank-you for your love, care, support, prayers and the many other ways you have supported me.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

— Mark 1:15 (ESV)

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis project sets out to correct what the writer believes is a shortcoming of the Christian faith. Christians are unable to identify the central message of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. To rectify this problem the thesis project sets out to preach a series of sermons from the parables to inform and transform postmodern audiences about the Kingdom of God. The parables of Jesus are studied to further investigate what Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God. An understanding of postmodernism is explored to challenge preachers to understand their contexts and to contextualize parables to the postmodern audience today.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### The Problem

Preachers face the daunting task of preaching to congregations that have become increasingly illiterate with the Bible. What is even more troubling is the Bible has become more available in print and accessible via the Internet and apps and yet Biblical illiteracy continues to rise in Canada. An Angus Reid poll suggests that since 1996, weekly Bible reading has declined by 60% and only 14% of Canadians actually read the Bible at least once a month.<sup>1</sup> There are more Bibles today than at any other point in the history of the church and yet Christians do not read and subsequently do not know the Word of God.

As more and more Christians become unfamiliar with the Bible it becomes more likely that Christians will no longer recognize the central message of Jesus. Believers often call Jesus their example, their master and teacher but fail to recognize what he taught. However this issue is not new but if no correction is offered for this deficiency it certainly will not improve. There has long been the belief that Christians cannot recognize the main theme in the preaching and teaching of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. “There is a gap between academics and church, between biblical scholarship and the

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<sup>1</sup> Angus Reid Group, *God and Society in North America: A Survey of Religion, Politics and Social Involvement in Canada and the United States*, October 1996.

pulpit on the subject of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom."<sup>2</sup> It is imperative for preachers to correct this huge deficiency by paying close attention to the content of Jesus and by preaching His core message.

Jesus stated clearly his purpose for coming to the world. Jesus explicitly stated the He came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. The following table provides scriptural references as examples for Jesus' purpose and message.

**Table 1.1. Bible References for Jesus' Main Purpose**

Scripture Text	Scripture References (ESV)
“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”	Matthew 4:23
“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.””	Mark 1:14-15
“But he said, ‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.’”	Luke 4:43
“After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.”	Luke 8:1

It is clearly evident through the above scriptures that Jesus' public ministry was described as a ministry of preaching and the content was the “Kingdom of God.” Jesus was committed to preaching about the Kingdom and He commissions His disciples to go and preach the same message, “When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2, ESV).

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<sup>2</sup> Vic Gordon, “The New Testament in the New Millennium” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books Publishing Group, 2004), 45.

The implication of Jesus' message has bearing on the church today. The gospel is a very important doctrine of the faith today. It sets the tone of the church and impacts the life of the believer. What was the content of the gospel for Jesus? If one believes that Jesus spoke mainly about love, then much of the dialogue will be about acceptance, tolerance and forgiveness for the sake of loving relationships. If one believes that Jesus spoke mainly about salvation, then the emphasis is about getting as many people to confess the sinner's prayer in an effort to avoid hell. The content of Jesus' gospel is to proclaim good news about the Kingdom of God. What will the implications be for the church and the believer? If we are preaching a different message is this a root cause for shallow discipleship, for consumerist Christianity and for observational faith rather than practical faith?

The writer believes that preachers today can easily distort the important message of Jesus. Jesus himself was a preacher. He preached a specific message. In the opinion of the writer, preachers today would do well to pay close attention to the message that Jesus proclaimed and to pass on that same message in their preaching to their congregations. This in essence becomes a discipleship issue. Vic Gordon states it in these words, "a disciple, as Jesus understood the word...was a person who learned from him and lived what he or she learned. As disciples or followers of Jesus today, we are obligated to know what he preached and taught. And how will we know unless our preachers proclaim it?"<sup>3</sup>

The subject of the Kingdom is not only neglected in many churches it is also misunderstood by many who believe they recognize the message of Jesus. There have

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<sup>3</sup> Vic Gordon, "The New Testament in the New Millennium," 50.

been many attempts to understand the nature of the Kingdom and its nuances. The writer agrees with Vic Gordon's statement about the Kingdom of God, "the reign of God or the rule of God. The kingdom of God is not a place nor a people, but God's active, dynamic rule. The kingdom is an act of God, that is, something he does."<sup>4</sup> The Kingdom of God is a theme that runs throughout the entire Bible and so the scope of this thesis will not be exhaustive. This paper will attempt to understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of the Kingdom through the parables.

The parables were a preaching tool that Jesus employed to "reveal and conceal" (Matthew 13:10-17) the truths of the Kingdom. Parables are powerful stories that spoke meaningfully about the Kingdom of God. The reactions that many of the parables received from the first-century hearers indicate that they were more than simple moralistic stories, but were subversive speeches meant to garner a significant reaction.<sup>5</sup> Parables can be preached in such a way that they can elicit a similar reaction from today's postmodern hearers. Part of this thesis will examine the nature, purpose and interpretation of the Kingdom parables in the context of the original hearers. Once the parable can be properly understood in the first-century context one can transition to ask what the parable means today. This is where contextualization takes place.

A word of caution needs to be made, while contextualization is important for today's hearers, it is imperative for preachers to remain faithful to the biblical text. Preachers cannot simply repeat the parables word for word and expect believers to simply

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<sup>4</sup> Vic Gordon, "The New Testament in the New Millennium," 45.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Lamerson, "Teaching the Parables to a Post-Modern Society: The Contextualization of the Stories of Jesus" (paper presented at the 50<sup>th</sup> National Conference for Evangelical Theological Society of Papers, Orlando, FL, November 19-21, 1998).

understand. Preaching of the Kingdom must be faithful to the original text, hearers and contexts and nuances for the postmodern ears of the day. Preaching needs to be grounded and connected to what Jesus proclaimed, the Kingdom of God.

Contextualization requires a good understanding of the receiving culture.

Postmodernism is the current climate of the day. Postmodernism can be simply summarized as the movement after the modern era. Though the summary seems vague and general the implications of postmodernism can be felt in all spheres of society from government, art, philosophy, sociology, economics, literature and the church. The thesis project will explore how postmodernism affects the worldview of the hearers in an effort to contextualize the Kingdom parables for today's hearers.

As followers of Jesus, preachers and hearers must have a desire to understand Him more fully. If the Kingdom of God is His primary message, if the desire is to know Him, one must understand His preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

### Purpose of the Thesis Project

The purpose of the thesis project is to examine if Christians in the postmodern context understand the central message of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is at hand. The assumption for the thesis is that a majority of Christians do not know the central message of the Kingdom. The writer will preach a series of sermons from the parables of Jesus to correct this shortcoming.

Jesus chose to use parables as a means to preach about the Kingdom of God. The thesis will examine several parables about the Kingdom of God and look at how they can

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<sup>6</sup> Vic Gordon, "The New Testament in the New Millennium," 50.

be contextualized for the postmodern audience so that believers can recognize the central message of Jesus. It is the hope of this writer to be faithful to the preaching of the parables as a means to inform and transform believers to orient their lives towards a Kingdom paradigm.

### **The Evaluative Setting**

The focus group will be a group of approximately 50 young adults between the ages of 19-40 who will be participating in a weekend retreat in the Greater Toronto Area. These young adults will come from a variety English speaking members of the Chinese churches in the Greater Toronto Area. The purpose for focusing on this age group is because in the opinion of the writer this age cohort has been greatly influenced by the postmodern worldview. Using the English ministries of the Chinese church is a natural fit as this is the current ministry context for writer.

### **Methodology and Instrumentation**

A random identification number will be provided to each participant. This number helps to maintain a level of anonymity for the respondents and allows the writer to compare the data between the pre-test and post-test questionnaire on the same individual.

An online pre-test questionnaire will be given to each person to collect some basic demographic information of the focus group. The pre-test questionnaire will also assess whether the individual can recognize the Kingdom of God as the central message of

Jesus' preaching. Finally the pre-test questionnaire will evaluate whether the respondents can identify the parables as the Jesus' main method of teaching.

A total of 9 sermons will be preached using Haddon Robinsons' *Big Idea of Preaching* methodology. The reason for using Robinson's method is based upon the preference and familiarity of writer. The writer currently uses this technique of preaching in the current ministry context.

The sermons will be based on the Parables of Jesus that explicitly deal directly with the Kingdom of God. The majority of these parable will begin with the words, "the Kingdom of God/Heaven is like..." These sermons will also be the base of the small group discussions where questions will be given to the groups and the discussions will be facilitated to allow for the sermons to be internalized.

Upon the completion of the final session an online post-test questionnaire will be given to each person. This post-test questionnaire will assess if the preaching has improved the respondents ability in recognizing the central message of the Kingdom. The post-test questionnaire will also have some personal reflection questions for how the message of the Kingdom will impact their day-to-day living. This portion of the questionnaire will also serve as a time capsule that the respondents can revisit in one year's time to see if they remember what they have learned about the Kingdom and to measure their resolve to live out the Kingdom principles in their everyday life.

### **Desired Outcomes**

One of the desired outcomes is the focus group will be able to recognize that the central message of Jesus is the Kingdom of God and to take to heart its importance. In

future when these individuals are asked to identify the central message of Jesus without hesitation they will be able to state, the Kingdom of God.

A second outcome is not only to recognize the Kingdom of God as the central message of Jesus but to correct any errors that were incorrectly assumed. In the observations of the writer, the Kingdom of God has also been misunderstood by many believers. It is the goal of the writer to help correct any inaccurate beliefs about the Kingdom of God. The worldview of the Kingdom of God will compete with the postmodern worldview and it is the hope of the writer that believers will allow the Kingdom worldview to impact and challenge postmodernity.

Another desired outcome is the hope that the sermons will transform the focus groups' outlook on the world around them and that they would be re-oriented to thinking, behaving and living out the Kingdom principles. The writer will ask the participants to reflect on how the Kingdom paradigm will impact their individual or family life, their work or school life, and their church and ministry life.

The fourth outcome for this project is for the sermons to be a valuable resource for a future sermon series in the local church context as a great deal of exegetical work and contextualization has already been completed. The writer has the opportunity to use these messages to challenge the local church context to also recognize the central message of Jesus and allow the Kingdom principles to impact every facet of the believer's life.

The final desired outcome is to utilize this material to teach and train future pastors. The writer hopes to one day use this material to teach a preaching course for pastors and lay leaders in a seminary or in a conference setting. The material can be

adapted to a setting on preaching the central message of Jesus, preaching to postmoderns or preaching parables today.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Introduction**

This paper suggests that many Christians cannot recognize that the central message of Jesus is about the Kingdom of God. In order to rectify this problem this paper will examine the parables of Jesus, particularly those that overtly and directly speak about the Kingdom. As these parables are examined, the paper will look at contextualizing the message of the Kingdom for the postmodern context.

The chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first will examine the theological framework of the Kingdom of God. This will provide at general overview how the Kingdom is portrayed throughout the Scriptures along with a Biblical foundation for the reader.

The second portion will provide a theological framework for understanding Parables. A study on the parables of Jesus that explicitly portray a teaching of the Kingdom will be emphasized. The paper will observe the purpose, the features and characteristics of Jesus' parables.

### **Theological Framework: The Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is a subject that continues to be a source of great confusion for many. There are many possible reasons for this misunderstanding. One reason is that Biblical literacy has declined tremendously. As Lillian Kwon noted in *The Christian*

*Post* article on June 16, 2014, “research indicates that Biblical literacy in America is at an all-time low.”<sup>1</sup> Although this is an American observation, in the experience of the writer, the Canadian contexts are never far off from the American ones. As the Bible becomes more unfamiliar with people, the subject of the Kingdom of God will also become unfamiliar.

Another reason for the confusion stems from the overall lack of teaching about the Kingdom. In the writer’s observations much of what is preached in churches has a tendency to be reactionary to the trends and pulls of the current times and culture. As a result, there is more teaching on how to handle life’s difficult situations, understanding God’s will for an individual, discovering God’s purposes for money, how to build and strengthen the family and the list goes on. With so many other subjects to cover, the Kingdom of God is often overlooked. Vic Gordon argues, “our congregations need to hear the Word of God describing Jesus as a preacher, and they need to hear what he preached.”<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, the subject of the Kingdom of God itself is puzzling. Richard Mayhue states, “a biblical study of God’s kingdom would lead one to conclude that it is variegated, multifaceted, multidimensional, multifocal, multifactorial, and multifarious. It certainly could not be considered as monolithic in character.”<sup>3</sup> The Kingdom is not

<sup>1</sup> Lillian Kwon, “Biblical Illiteracy in US at Crisis Point, Says Bible Expert,” *The Christian Post*, June 16, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/biblical-illiteracy-in-us-at-crisis-point-says-bible-expert-121626/>

<sup>2</sup> Vic Gordon, “The New Testament in the New Millennium” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books Publishing Group, 2004), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Mayhue, “The Kingdom of God: An Introduction,” *the Master’s Seminary Journal* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 169.

something that can be easily be grasped. The Kingdom contains paradoxes, teachings that seem to defy logic, and as people are asked to compare and contrast the elements of the Kingdom there are no simple answers. A correct understanding of the Kingdom will impact the believers' understanding of Christ and the Christian life, "there is an unbroken, almost necessary, linkage between how one defines the kingdom message of Jesus, how one understands the overall thrust of the ministry and message of Jesus, and what one believes about his person. If the definition of the kingdom is off, so is the rest."<sup>4</sup>

One of the most scathing remarks comes from Ian Wilkinson and yet his remarks can be observed as accurate. He points out, "the kingdom paradox is that the people called to represent the kingdom, and to preach the kingdom, don't know what it is."<sup>5</sup> It is saddening that many who call themselves a follower of Christ do not know what Christ actually taught, which leads to questioning who or what are believers actually following?

In the Gospel of Mark, the first words from Jesus are, "the time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15, ESV). One can imagine that the opening words of Jesus' ministry would summarize His purpose for coming. The Kingdom has arrived and it has arrived in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. This opening statement communicates that the Kingdom of God would be the central theme of Jesus' earthly ministry. Fuellenbach puts

<sup>4</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, "The Kingdoms of God: The Kingdom in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," in *The Kingdom of God (Theology in Community)*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Loc: 316, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Wilkinson, *Understanding the Kingdom of God* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2009), 2.

it in these terms, “the most basic historical fact of Jesus’ life is the symbol which dominated all his preaching, the reality that gave meaning to all his activities, that is, the Kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup> From this point onwards the Kingdom would be evident in the preaching, teaching and miracles of Jesus.

### What is the Kingdom of God?

“What is the Kingdom of God?” is often the first question that comes to mind. Ladd provides a starting point for consideration. “The key to an understanding of the kingdom of God is that the basic meaning of the Greek word *basileia*, as of the Hebrew *malkut*, is rule, reign, dominion.”<sup>7</sup> To extrapolate from Ladd a simple definition is a Kingdom is a place where a king rules. In simply transferring this definition to the discussion of the Kingdom of God, one can infer that the Kingdom of God is the place where God reigns and rules over the lives of His subjects.

Ian Wilkinson references Ern Baxter by stating that, “the kingdom of God as the government of God.”<sup>8</sup> In the Kingdom everything is subject to God’s authority and power, without question. Stephen Um expressed the Kingdom of God in this way, “the kingdom of God is fundamentally God’s sovereign rule expressed and realized through the different stages of redemptive history.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 3.

<sup>7</sup> George Ladd, “Kingdom of God/Heaven,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3 (J-O), ed. Walter Elwell, 1269-1278. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 1269.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkinson, *Understanding the Kingdom of God*. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Um, *The Kingdom of God*, The Gospel Coalition Booklets, ed. D.A. Carson and Timothy Keller (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), Loc: 129, Kindle.

The Kingdom of God involves the reign and rule of God. Anthony Hoekema has described God's Kingdom as "the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of his people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth."<sup>10</sup> For the Jews the term "kingdom" often carried with it the notion of "reigning" or a dominion. Therefore the "Kingdom of God" is wherever the reign or dominion of God is manifested.

The writer strongly agrees with Vic Gordon's statement about the Kingdom of God and uses this as the main reference throughout the thesis project, "the reign of God or the rule of God. The kingdom of God is not a place nor a people, but God's active, dynamic rule. The kingdom is an act of God, that is, something he does."<sup>11</sup>

#### Overview of the Kingdom of God Throughout Scripture

In Mark 1, Jesus claims that the time of fulfillment for the Kingdom of God had come and it is worthwhile to note that Jesus did not further elaborate on what the Kingdom was. At the same time no one seems to ask for clarity or a definition of the term. It can be inferred that no explanation was needed since the term Kingdom of God was a well known concept in first century Palestine. It is assumed that the New Testament eyewitnesses and audience had a working understanding of the Kingdom of God based in the Old Testament. It was part of the everyday vocabulary of the Jews.

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Vic Gordon, "The New Testament in the New Millennium," 45.

The people of God understood, through the passing of stories, that God has come in the past and that He has intervened in favor of His people, through this act of remembering, the Jews continued to have hope that God will come once again in the future.

One of the important elements of Jewish thinking was that God is transcendent, sovereign, imminent and bound to His people. Through His Kingdom the Israelites would bear witness to the punishment of evil and the deliverance of the oppressed.

The Jews were expecting a decisive intervention of God to restore the glory of Israel and to defeat its enemies. When John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom was at hand, the first century hearers believed that God's intervention was imminent and everything that would occur would result in the overthrow of the Roman oppressors. George Buchanan states, "The day of comfort would come when the Kingdom of God was revealed, the kingdom of the house of David ruled from Jerusalem, and Rome was displaced. These things would happen all at once."<sup>12</sup>

However the Kingdom initiated by Jesus was not only an earthly kingdom that the Jews inferred from the Old Testament prophecies. Rather Jesus' view of the Kingdom was a spiritual kingdom that was inaugurated and began to grow in the hearts of God's people. The final fulfillment of the Kingdom is the eventual sovereign rule of God and the defeat of all evil. Those who belong to the Kingdom will serve Him and inherit eternal life in God's presence, "the kingdom is not a matter of outward rules or rituals concerning what you can eat or drink. It is a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy in

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<sup>12</sup> George Wesley Buchanan, *Jesus, the King and His Kingdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 21.

the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of serving Christ. The key is “serving.” We serve Christ by obeying him.”<sup>13</sup>

### Overview of the Kingdom of God: Old Testament

It is the purpose of this section to highlight the various teachings of the Kingdom of God as found in the Old Testament. The following will not be an exhaustive, comprehensive study but to highlight a few key areas to help the reader grasp more fully the complexity and nuances of the Kingdom from the scriptures.

### The Kingdom of God and Creation

Creation is God’s act to share His love and fellowship with beings other than Himself. Nothing compels God to create humanity except for His own love and purpose. Through the act of creation God reminds humanity that his rule began at creation as nothing came into existence without His command. Stephen Um echoes this idea by writing, “God’s royal rule began with his sovereign administration and preservation of the cosmic order he had created.”<sup>14</sup>

The entire creation is grounded in the goodness of God and with each day of creation that goodness is proclaimed with the culmination being the creation of humanity. Adam and Eve were first created to live in fellowship with God under His blessed rule and direction for their lives for God’s glory and their happiness. Through creation and this relationship, God purposed His Kingdom, “the blessedness of kingdom existence

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<sup>13</sup> Ian Wilkinson, *Understanding the Kingdom of God*, 4.

<sup>14</sup>Um, *The Kingdom of God*, Loc: 22, Kindle.

consisted in both the relationship of man to God and the relationships of man to creation.<sup>15</sup> God called man to serve Him by naming the animals, ruling over the fish and birds and every creeping thing, to subdue the earth and every living thing and to live under the rule of God (Genesis 1:28-30). The Kingdom was one of communion between God and humanity. Humanity's service was to God and the whole created order obeyed the Creator King.

### The Kingdom of God and the Fall

The sad story of the fall follows the remarkable story of creation. The fall of man disrupts God's good creation and tarnishes humanity. Humanity is now tainted and the creation is now cursed. Satan was able to establish a foothold in God's creation and on God's people. Adam and Eve forfeited their relationships with God and as a result forfeited the Kingdom, "with the fall into sin, humans forfeited fellowship with God and life itself. They therefore forfeited the kingdom of God – that is, they forfeited the reign of peace, blessing, and communion with God in and for their lives."<sup>16</sup>

Through the fall Satan becomes the prince and ruler of the earth (e.g. Ephesians 2:2; John 12:31). God's plan for the world and His Kingdom would appear to be in jeopardy but God's purposes cannot be thwarted. He immediately promises the re-establishment of His kingship through the seed of the woman, "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15, ESV).

<sup>15</sup> Graeme Coldsworthy, "The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament," *Present Truth Magazine*, Vol22, Article 4. <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XXII/22-4.htm>

<sup>16</sup> J. Mark Beach, "The Kingdom of God: A Brief Exposition of its Meaning and Implications," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 23, no. 3 (2012): 57.

At the fall, the Kingdom of Darkness is established and works in opposition to the Kingdom of God. In order for the Kingdom of God to come on earth once more, it would have to be God's responsibility and through His intervention. The Kingdom will come through His power and love.

God continues to exercise His kingship and sovereignty. He continues to rule over all things with power and wisdom. God is sovereign and God has never lost His sovereignty. At the fall God could have cast all evil aside and destroyed humanity. However He chooses to re-enter fellowship with humanity out of His love. All the while His sovereignty has never been compromised or changed. God did not lose His plan of the Kingdom, "but He must re-create his kingdom of fellowship and healing. God's sovereignty simply and always is; but the Kingdom of God must be purchased through the precious blood of Jesus Christ and come to reality through the Spirit's application of Christ's redemptive work."<sup>17</sup> God adjusts His plans for the sake of His love for humanity.

### The Kingdom of God and the Covenant

The calling of Abraham and the creation of the Abrahamic covenant would continue the plan of God's Kingdom. God's covenant with Abraham is that he and his offspring will become a Kingdom. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through

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<sup>17</sup> Beach, "The Kingdom of God," 59.

you” (Genesis 12:2-3, NIV). All the covenants to come have their foundation in the Abrahamic covenant.

The Kingdom will come through Abraham’s offspring and through this lineage a blessing will come for all nations. As the offspring of Abraham’s line increases one from the tribe of Judah will rule and will accomplish God’s sovereign reign and restore the Kingdom on the earth.

Through Moses and the Mosaic covenant the building of the kingdom continues. God makes a covenant with the nation of Israel and calls them out of Egypt through His mighty acts. The people of Israel are called to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6, NIV). This will come to fruition as God rules over Israel with his Holy Law and in the Tabernacle God would set His throne in Israel as their King.

Progressing further through the Old Testament the Israelites desire to have a physical King in place. God grants them a Kingdom with physical boundaries and eventually a noble King named David and the Davidic covenant. This King was selected by God because He feared the Lord and was willing to follow His Word. David is often referred to as a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22). Through King David the covenant was continued that one of David’s descendants would always sit on the throne, “when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”<sup>18</sup> This foreshadows the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Samuel 7:12-13 (ESV).

### The Kingdom of God in the Psalms and Prophets

The Hebrew worship manual entitled Psalms, gives honor to God and recognizes His Kingship. Many songs acknowledge God as King and his sovereign reign over creation and all things. Praise and glory belong to God for His reign in heaven and on earth. With regards to the Kingdom of God, the book of Psalms describes it as eternal and that God's rule would be infinite as found in Psalm 145:13 (NIV), "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations." The book of Psalms also recognizes the vast dimensions of God's kingdom over all the nations, "for kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:28, ESV). The Psalms also describe the Kingdom as present in the world and still to come, "the LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19, ESV).

By the time of the prophets, the people of Israel had developed expectations of the Kingdom. However, through the prophets it is revealed that God is disappointed with Israel and their kings because of the disobedience of His people. It is through this act of disobedience the people would be taken into exile and part of the recovery of the Kingdom is the eventual return of God's people to their land as described in Obadiah,

Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau,  
 and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines;  
 they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria,  
 and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.  
 The exiles of this host of the people of Israel  
 shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath,  
 and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad  
 shall possess the cities of the Negeb.  
 Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion

to rule Mount Esau,  
and the kingdom shall be the LORD's (Obadiah 1:19-21, ESV).

### The Messianic Kingdom

By the conclusion of the Old Testament the Israelites had developed a theology and understanding of the coming Messianic Kingdom. There was hope and anticipation for this day to come. The Messianic Kingdom included some of the following characteristics.

The first is the Messiah, the Anointed One, would be a descendent of King David. This will serve as a fulfillment of the covenant with King David. The Messiah would rule the nations under the anointing of the Spirit of God. Messiah would rule as both priest and King over Israel and the world (cf. Zechariah 6:12-13; Psalm 110:4).

The second important feature is that the Messiah would rule with the central characteristics of righteousness and peace. These are considered foundational pillars for the Kingdom. Messiah would rule the nations with righteousness. There would be no more corruption, and justice would prevail (cf. Isaiah 65:21-22; Psalm 72:4). The Messiah would abolish all warfare and establish and everlasting peace (cf. Isaiah 9:7; Micah 4:3-4).

Lastly, the Messianic Kingdom will be permanent. The Messiah will reign over all the earth. Nothing will be outside His rule and dominion. His reign will last forever. The kingdom will have no end.

## Overview of the Kingdom of God: the New Testament

### The Gospels: John the Baptist - the Forerunner

The Kingdom of God begins with proclamation made by John the Baptist, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2, ESV). John would speak about the coming Kingdom in terms of Messiah. John understood his role to be the forerunner to the Messiah. The angelic announcement of John the Baptist’s birth shows he is linked directly as a forerunner of the messianic reign (cf. Luke 1:15-17; Malachi 4:5-6). His preaching of the imminent arrival of the Messianic Kingdom was focused on spiritually preparing the people for the Kingdom through baptism, “Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6, ESV).

### The Gospels: Jesus’ Preaching, Teaching and Redemptive Work

It is generally agreed that the central message of Jesus was about the Kingdom of God, “modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray also echoes this sentiment by stating, “there is one area in the testimony of the gospels to Jesus the authenticity of which is agreed on by virtually all New Testament scholars – namely, the teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 54.

<sup>20</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), x.

Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom was the same as John the Baptist's, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17, ESV). Jesus' announcement about the Kingdom was accompanied by signs and wondrous events. Norman Perrin states, "Jesus appeared as one who proclaimed the Kingdom; all else in his message and ministry serves a function in relation to that proclamation and derives its meaning from it."<sup>21</sup> Through the healing of the sick, and the raising of the dead, the Kingdom was bringing healing and providing hope for the people.

The Kingdom of God and the person of Jesus are closely linked with one another. Jesus inaugurates the kingdom and without Jesus there is no Kingdom, "The New Testament locates the Kingdom on Jesus' person and ministry. Jesus brought the Kingdom. Apart from Jesus, there would have been no Kingdom."<sup>22</sup>

Jesus embarks on the work to usher in the Kingdom of God. His purpose is to regain the reign of fellowship over creation through a rule that is redemptive and healing. Christ's coming ushers in the kingdom as having arrived in principle, but its consummation or fullness is still to come. Christ is the centerpiece of the Kingdom. Marshall puts it in this way, "the Kingdom came in the person, deeds and word of Jesus."<sup>23</sup> He embodies the elements of healing, justice and righteousness which are elements of God's Kingdom.

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<sup>21</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 54.

<sup>22</sup> George Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 156.

<sup>23</sup> Howard Marshall, "The Hope of a New Age: The Kingdom of God in the New Testament," In *The Spirit and the New Age*, vol. 5 *Wesleyan Theological Perspectives*, eds. Alex Deasley and R. Larry Shelton, 319-355 (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, Inc., 1986), 335.

Jesus declares the arrival of the Kingdom in Mark 1:15 (ESV), “the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” The Kingdom requires repentance, the turning from sin through faith and a turning to the Lord. Jesus proclaims the blessings of the Kingdom that those who are trapped in bondage and brokenness can now have freedom and healing while those who are alienated and under the curse will have no part in the fellowship and blessing.

Jesus’ proclamations inaugurated the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is imminent, it is now in the midst of the people because it centers on Jesus. He has arrived. The Kingdom is “at hand” but it awaits the fullness of Jesus’ ministry of the cross, the resurrection, ascension and the eventual gathering of the saints. Scott McKnight refers to Jesus’ sacrifice in this way, “Jesus saw his mission in terms of sacrifice, and he must have connected this sacrifice with the Kingdom. It begs logic to think that Jesus did not connect the two. Jesus believed that he was sacrificing himself for the sake of ushering the Kingdom of God.”<sup>24</sup>

The arrival of Jesus Christ must be recognized by all people that the Kingdom has come. Through the preaching, teaching and works of Jesus, the miracles and healings are all manifestations of the Kingdom, but the full reality of the Kingdom is not evident until the second coming of Jesus. Jesus’ first arrival brought a conclusion to the Old Testament notions of the coming Messiah and Kingdom. The promises of God in the Old Testament reach fulfillment and consummation in Jesus. This is noted by Stephen Um who writes, “the final stage of the kingdom on earth being realized by the incarnation and

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<sup>24</sup> Scott McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teaching of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 117.

the ongoing ministry of Christ,<sup>25</sup> but the promises of God in the New Testament are still to come.

As a result the term, “already but not yet” becomes part of the narrative of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is full of paradoxes, in that it has come and is yet to come; it is both now and in the future. “Although this earthly ministry is already present, the consummate and complete fulfillment will not yet be realized until the return of Christ in glory.”<sup>26</sup> The Kingdom of God is inaugurated, it has arrived in part but it is yet to reach its final consummation. The “already” is reflected in the healing and redemptive reign of God, the “not yet” is why believers continue to pray for healing and for the reign of God to come.

The Gospel of Matthew makes a similar reference through the language “this age and the age to come” (Matthew 12:32, ESV). “Age” refers to the world under the regime of darkness and Satan, while “age to come” refers to the world under the regime of Christ and consummation of glory. The “age” is a battleground and an assault of God’s reign but the “age to come” refers to the sanctuary of peace, fellowship and the full manifestation and victory of the reign of God.

Jesus primarily uses the parables as a tool to speak about the Kingdom of God, “the primary focus of the parables is the coming of the kingdom of God and the resulting discipleship that is required.”<sup>27</sup> A.M. Hunter also concurs by stating, “all Jesus’ parables

<sup>25</sup> Um, *The Kingdom of God*, Loc: 174, Kindle.

<sup>26</sup> Um, *The Kingdom of God*, Loc: 174, Kindle.

<sup>27</sup> K.R. Snodgrass, “Parable,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, 591-601, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992).

have to do, in one way or another, with the coming of the kingdom of God.”<sup>28</sup> More description and discussion regarding the parables will be presented later in this chapter.

### Acts, the Epistles and Revelation

As one moves past the Gospels to Acts and the Epistles, references about the Kingdom are less prevalent. In the book of Acts Jesus’ remaining forty days on earth were centered on the subject of the Kingdom of God, “...appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3, NIV). During this time the description of the Kingdom transitions from a Kingdom that is already present in some way, to a Kingdom that is still awaiting completion in the future. The delay occurs as a result of the missionary task given to the church to reach the world with the message of the Kingdom. F. David Farnell echoes this idea in writing, “Jesus was recasting His kingdom as spiritual and denying a literal physical kingdom is clearly not the case here. He does not negate but delay its realization due to missionary proclamation through the world of the gospel message to all peoples.”<sup>29</sup>

Moving to the Epistles the Kingdom continues to embrace the notion of having a present form but the emphasis centers more on a future kingdom and not a present one.<sup>30</sup> The following verses, promotes the notion that the Kingdom of God will be inherited at a

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<sup>28</sup> A.M. Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), 19.

<sup>29</sup> F. David Farnell, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 203.

<sup>30</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, ” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 104-105.

future time (cf. 1 Corinthians. 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:12-13; James 2:5; 2 Peter 2:11).

Lastly the Kingdom of God is eternal and shall exist forever and cannot be shaken. Revelation 1:6 (ESV), “and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.” The Kingdom is also a future event yet to be fully experienced, “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15, ESV). For believers it is a hope that even though difficulties will arise in the lives of believers as they pass through the stages of the Kingdom. Believers rely heavily on the hope of the eternal Kingdom in order to remain faithful to God through the difficulties.

### Understanding the Kingdom

#### Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven

The Kingdom of God was the centerpiece of Jesus’ teaching. In the Gospel of Matthew the term “Kingdom of Heaven” is used more commonly. Through the use of these terms it is clear that both phrases are referring to the same thing. Jesus speaks to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:23 (ESV); he makes a bold statement that, “only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.” In the very next verse, Jesus continues, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24, ESV). Jesus makes no distinction between the two terms and seems to use them interchangeably. George E. Ladd was a prominent theologian who wrote on the topic of the Kingdom of God holds to the same notion, “no difference of meaning is to be seen between ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘kingdom

of heaven' (Greek: the kingdom of the heavens) although the latter may place somewhat more emphasis on the transcendental source and character of the Kingdom."<sup>31</sup>

Other scriptural proof for these synonymous terms is evident in the Gospels of Mark and Luke where the term Kingdom of God is used. The Gospel of Matthew will frequently parallel the same parable but use the term "Kingdom of Heaven." The following table demonstrates where Matthew uses the term "Kingdom of Heaven" while Mark and/or Luke used the phrase "Kingdom of God."

**Table 2.1 – Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God Comparison**

Kingdom of Heaven – Matthew	Kingdom of God – Mark & Luke
Matthew 11:11-12	Luke 7:28
Matthew 13:11	Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10
Matthew 13:24	Mark 4:26
Matthew 13:31	Mark 4:30; Luke 13:18
Matthew 13:33	Luke 13:20
Matthew 18:3	Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16
Matthew 22:2	Luke 13:29

### The Kingdom: Both Now and Not Yet

The Kingdom of God has both a present and a future element. "Most scholars agree in general that Jesus thought he was inaugurating the kingdom through his words and deeds but believe that a consummation of the kingdom was yet future."<sup>32</sup> One can hear the message that the Kingdom of God is here and now, and yet in other scriptures one will observe that the Kingdom is still to come. The Kingdom of God

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<sup>31</sup> Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 110.

<sup>32</sup> Scott McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 75.

has already begun. It is already active, but will be fully consummated when Christ comes again. Kummel writes, “He believed that the kingdom was present in the ministry of Jesus, yet its consummation awaited a near future fulfillment. It was neither entirely present nor entirely future; rather, the kingdom was a future event whose present and power were already being felt through Jesus’ ministry.”<sup>33</sup>

Mark Beach believes the Kingdom of God’s “now” and “not yet” view in this way:

...The ‘now’ and ‘already’ of the kingdom of God is reflected wherever the healing and redemptive reign of God is gaining ascendancy – the church being the exhibit front and center of this. The ‘not yet’ of the kingdom is why we continue to pray for the healing reign of God to come. Thus the kingdom is here now. But it is not here in its fullness, in all of its healing scope, in its completeness, in its consummate state.<sup>34</sup>

The Kingdom is “now.” By virtue of Jesus’ authority and rule the kingdom has already been inaugurated. Observations from various scripture references point out that Jesus Christ has been given authority and all things have been placed under his rule.<sup>35</sup> The church also contains elements of the Kingdom and as such the church exists now and subsequently the Kingdom exists now. The spiritual kingdom is present as the rule of God is upon the hearts of believers today.

The Kingdom is “not yet.” Jesus also spoke about the kingdom in future terms about the culmination of the Kingdom when Christ returns. Scripture also provides insights to a coming judgment that will eventually separate those inheriting

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<sup>33</sup> Werner George Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1957), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Beach, *The Kingdom of God*, 66-67.

<sup>35</sup> Luke 11:20, 17:20-21; Matthew 12:28, 21:31 (ESV).

the Kingdom by those who follow and obey the will of the Father as opposed to those who do not.<sup>36</sup> The coming Kingdom will usher in an everlasting peace, fellowship and destruction of evil.

### The Kingdom of God and the Church

The Kingdom of God and the church are interrelated but are not interchangeable terms. Throughout the scriptures there are several distinctions made between the church and the Kingdom. In scripture the term *ekklesia* (the church) is never used as a substitute for the term *basileia* (Kingdom). However there is a relationship between the two terms, as the church is made up of those who have submitted to Christ's rule in their lives and have accepted the offer of being in His Kingdom.

One of the challenges of the church is that false believers can be mixed in with true believers. Many often go undetected and unrecognized. This demonstrates that the church is both visible and invisible. The visible church is the church in its present form as observed today. It is a mixture of both believer and nonbeliever. The invisible church is the church that is known only to God, in its pure form, believers who are called and regenerated by the work of the Spirit. "The church visible and as invisible means that there does not yet exist an exact numerical unity between the church in its current visible state and the church in its invisible reality. God redemptively communes with its genuine members."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Luke 12:32, 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:17 (ESV).

<sup>37</sup> Beach, *The Kingdom of God*, 54-55.

The church is to be recognized as one part institution and one part organism. The institutional church is the gathered body of believers under the leadership of officers. The purpose of which is to bring good news of the Kingdom to the world and at the same time nurture its members. The church as one part organism can be seen in its dynamic relationships among believers through birth, growth and decay both physically and spiritually.

“The church is not the Kingdom now, because the Kingdom makes itself present outside the church as well. Her mission is to serve the Kingdom and not to take its place.”<sup>38</sup> The church consists of God’s people sent into the world to fulfill their calling and to exercise their influence in all spheres of life through both words and action. Christians are called to exercise a Christ honoring presence in the wider social fabric of life, work, politics, education, justice, recreation, hobbies and community.

#### Conclusion: The Kingdom of God

In conclusion the purpose of this section was to provide a foundation for how this project will approach the subject of the “Kingdom of God.” The Old Testament helps to develop the understanding of the Kingdom in the first century world when Jesus arrives. The Kingdom is seen as the reign of God over his people and with the coming of Jesus the kingdom has been inaugurated and is awaiting its consummation. George Ladd summarizes in this way:

The kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and

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<sup>38</sup> Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 16.

to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history. It is precisely this background which provides the setting for the parables of the Kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

### **Theological Framework: The Parables of Jesus**

This portion of the paper will examine more closely the Parables of Jesus. It will begin by defining the parables and transition to understand the reason Jesus spoke in parables. For the purpose of this study the focus will be primarily on the parables that explicitly describe or present the Kingdom of God. The outlines will follow the chronological order as they are found in the Gospels, starting in the book of Matthew. A brief summary will be provided to understand the historical treatment of parables followed by some guidelines for the proper interpretation to aid in the sermon preparation.

#### **Definition of a Parable**

The word “parable” is a transliteration of the Greek “*parabole*” (para-bow-lay). It comes from two Greek words, “para” (translated “beside”) and “ballo” (translated “to throw”). The word parable literally means “to throw beside” or “to cast alongside.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 218.

<sup>40</sup>David Noel Freedman, ed. *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: O-Sh*, s.v. “Parable.” New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

As defined by *Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, it "signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison."<sup>41</sup> The general idea of a parable is to place one thing beside another for the purpose of comparison. Often times Jesus will use the term "like" in His parables as a means of comparison. Parables are stories or narratives drawn from nature or from every day human experience. Wiersbe describes parables as, "a story that places one thing beside another for the purpose of teaching...it puts the known next to the unknown so that we may learn."<sup>42</sup>

A parable compares two unlike things and as a literary device it acts in three ways: compare, contrast or parallel. The intent of the parable is to inform the hearer by describing some form of reality and to affect the hearer with a vivid picture. A parable has the ability to captivate the listener and persuade their ideas and even catch one off guard with its conclusions. Due to the vividness and complexity the hearer finds it difficult to ignore the implications. Lastly the impact "comes suddenly, usually before people are able to defend themselves against its message."<sup>43</sup>

C.H. Dodd's classic definition has captured the essence of the parable. This definition is highly regarded and has stood the test of time. "At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its

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<sup>41</sup>William Edwy Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, s.v. "Parable." Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984. Accessed February 9, 2014. <http://www.menfak.no/bibelprog/vines?word=%AFt0002050>

<sup>42</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Windows on the Parables* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1979), 11.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Stein, "The Genre of the Parables," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 47-48.

vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”<sup>44</sup>

### Purpose of a Parable

The question is often posed, “Why did Jesus decide to speak in Parables?” In conversation with His disciples Jesus gives the reason why He chooses to speak in parables. The disciples ask Jesus in Matthew 13:10-17 (NIV),

“The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;

though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

For this people’s heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,

and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

### To Conceal

From the above passage taken from Matthew 13, Jesus spoke in parables to conceal the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven from the crowds (Matthew 13:11).

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<sup>44</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 5.

Jesus was willing to teach those who wanted to follow Him and at the same time He would prevent others from understanding what was being said. Not everyone in the crowd was truly willing to follow Jesus. Some were curious, others were skeptical, some were prejudiced, some were hardened and others hated Him. Parables were used to conceal the truth of the Kingdom from these types of people. “The parables were designed to unfold secrets to those whom He wanted to hear them and to hide secrets from those He didn’t.”<sup>45</sup>

Those who were not interested in obeying the teachings of Jesus would hear the parables and fail to grasp its meaning, “but whoever does not have [*an honest and receptive heart*], even what he has will be taken away from him [*by failing to understand and being sent away.*]” (Matthew 13:12b, NIV).

Jesus spoke in parables because of the hardness of many people's hearts as described in Matthew 13:10-17. For those who had hard hearts the parables concealed the truth from them. The disciples on the other hand were blessed to learn the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. Many in the crowds had hard hearts and for them, Jesus spoke in parables (cf. Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:10-12). After speaking with the crowds, Jesus would then explain the parables in private to His disciples, “with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mark 4:33-34, ESV).

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<sup>45</sup> R.T. Kendall, *The Parables of Jesus: A guide to Understanding and Applying the Stories Jesus Taught* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2006), 15.

By using parables, Jesus effectively separated the truth-seekers from the curiosity-seekers. Those who wanted to understand the truth would seek an explanation, “explain to us the parable” (Matthew 13:36, ESV). The curious would easily walk away.

The parables were also used to carry out divine judgment. Osborne writes, “those who reject the presence of God in Jesus (the leaders of the Jews) the parable becomes a sign of sovereign judgment, further hardening their hearts.”<sup>46</sup> There would be a separation for those who listen and those who do not. Those who would listen and take to heart the message would be given more and will be blessed, but those who refused to listen will miss out and be cast aside. “Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (Matthew 13:12, NIV).

### To Reveal

The secondary purpose of the parables was to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who genuinely sought the truth and were willing to obey often asked Jesus for an explanation of the parables. Jesus would then give them the meaning of the parable privately (Mark 4:33-34).

Jesus would use the parables to reveal something of significance that the people had become blind towards, “he wanted to persuade men to pass a judgment on

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<sup>46</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 239.

things with which they were well acquainted and then to compel them to transfer that judgments to something to whose significance they had been blind.”<sup>47</sup>

Jesus would take the “known” (earthly truth) and compare it to the “unknown” (heavenly truth) so that the disciples would know the truth and this would shed further light on the unknown. Therefore, with the help of the Lord's explanation of His parables we can learn more about "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:34-35).

#### Subject of the Parables

The general theme of the parables is the Kingdom of God. Again the Gospel of Matthew uses the term, “Kingdom of Heaven”, which is interchangeable with “Kingdom of God”. The parables often speak directly about the Kingdom as is cited by Snodgrass, “Jesus came as a prophet using a prophetic tool – parables – with a prophetic intent to confront the nation with the message of the Kingdom.”<sup>48</sup> Those parables that explicitly talk about the Kingdom will begin with the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven is like, or the kingdom of God is like...”

Many of these parables will address the Kingdom of God under the following themes. Some parables will present the characteristics of the Kingdom. The parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32) informs the hearer that the Kingdom will

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<sup>47</sup> William Barclay, *And Jesus Said: A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1970), 13.

<sup>48</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Key Questions on the Parables of Jesus,” *Review & Expositor Journal* 109, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 175.

have a small beginning but will eventually become great. Its humble beginnings will be disproportional to its eventual growth.

Other parables will describe the character of the King or ruler. The parable of the workers and the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) gives the hearers an image of God who dispenses mercy and grace at His discretion. God has the right to have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy.

Lastly parables will also present a description of the characteristics of the Kingdom person. The parables of the unmerciful servant found in Matthew 18:21-35 gives a sobering image of the expectations God has for the citizens of His Kingdom. Kingdom persons should recognize that they have been greatly forgiven and in turn should offer forgiveness to others.

### Characteristics of a Parable

Parables were short, concise and to the point. “Jesus’ parables are first of all brief, even terse. Parables use no more words than necessary.”<sup>49</sup> It is possible that the parables brevity stems from the historical context they were spoken in. The first-century Jewish oral culture much of the population learned through the discipline of hearing and memorization.<sup>50</sup>

Parables are also concrete, not abstract. “Parables are examples of concrete thought, not abstract thought. Oral people think concretely.”<sup>51</sup> Given the cultural

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<sup>49</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 37, 40.

<sup>51</sup> Scott, “Hear Then the Parable,” 37.

settings the more concrete the story the better the hearer could listen, learn and remember. The words and illustrations used by Jesus were common to the everyday hearer.

Parables did not allow a person to remain neutral. “The major way by which Jesus forced decision was to break conventional lines in his parables. Time and again a totally unexpected turn of events startled the hearers and forced them to consider the deeper implications of the parable.”<sup>52</sup> People were forced to respond to Jesus’ call to join Him in this new Kingdom. The parables were a useful tool to break into the resistant minds with insights that stunned the hearers, not only with a surprise and twist but also with shocking wisdom. For those who did not hear what they expected, they simply refused to hear what Jesus was saying. To understand the parable one has to work at it and if not, one would not understand the meaning. If one works at the parable and understands, it moves the hearer to more difficult insights of the Kingdom of God. For those who rejected the parables, they became tools of judgment. The more one continues to reject its insights and claims, the more one was unable to understand.

Parables are common ordinary stories. They used elements that were found in the immediate world of the listeners. Elements such as coins, sheep, vineyards, birds, mustard seeds, wicked tenants, weddings and hospitality, were commonplace and normally understood in the first century context.<sup>53</sup> Jesus used these familiar images and out of these insignificant details the shocking truth would be revealed.

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<sup>52</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 240.

The majority of parables had a basic structure. Most of the parables have one main story while some may have more than one subplot. One of the key structural features of a parable is the use of repetition. Repetition was used mainly as a means to stress the importance of a major point.<sup>54</sup> The parables always had a conclusion. The conclusion usually came as a brief phrase or a question. The closing phrase gave a brief interpretation of the parable as well as the implications the parable was to have on the audience. Parables not only inform the hearer, it is meant to transform and affect the audience into action.

The parables often times had an element of surprise and this usually happened when the story contained a detail that was unexpected or a reversal of the norm. “Since they frequently seek to reorient thought and behavior, in keeping with Jesus’ teaching elsewhere parables often contain elements of reversal.”<sup>55</sup> Jesus loved to shatter the expectations of the hearers by reversing the norms. The endings of His parables often clashed with the audience’s expectations. It is important to remember that the parables were spoken in a specific time, place and culture. The challenge today is that many will not be familiar with the cultural norms of the time.

The parables have a poignant point that often the crowds were not expecting. The reason for the disturbing arguments is that Jesus often challenges the ethics of the people. “The presence of the kingdom in Jesus demands a higher ethical stance on the part of his followers.”<sup>56</sup> The point of the parable is to help people see that God’s Kingdom requires

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<sup>54</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 241.

<sup>55</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 243.

His followers to act differently from their norms or expectations. The Kingdom message is a call to a radically different way of living.

### Guidelines for Interpreting Parables

The responsibility of the preacher is to rightly handle the word of truth and being able to communicate it effectively to the congregation. The preacher is called to study the parables and to correctly understand them in their context of time and the context of the Scriptures. The following are suggested guidelines to help achieve proper interpretation of the parables for the preparation of the sermon. There is an underlying assumption that the work of biblical interpretation will be guided by the prompting of the Holy Spirit through prayer and discernment.

### Context

It is imperative that the preacher look carefully at the context that the parables are spoken. It would be prudent to observe what comes before and after the telling of the parable. “Keys to interpretation can be found in the context...often the key to interpretation can be found in the prologue to the parable...at other times the epilogue of the parable gives a key to the proper interpretation...in some parables, information for interpretation is given in both the epilogue as well as the prologue.”<sup>57</sup> This informs the reader as to whom Jesus is addressing. The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 informs

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<sup>57</sup> Vernon Doerkson, “The Interpretation of Parables,” *Grace Theological Journal* 11, no. 2 (1970): 12.

the reader that Jesus is addressing the crowds and following the parable Jesus gives greater details to His disciples and even interprets the parable for them.

On some occasions the parable contains a “lead-in” just prior to the telling of the parable. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, a religious man asks Jesus, “who is my neighbour?” The lead-in sets the expectations of the hearer to anticipate an answer to the question in the parable.

It is important to also note where the context of the parable occurs within the Gospel itself. Sometimes the placement of the parable in the Gospel suggests an intention of the author. Lightfoot is correct in stating, “The background of the parable and the context of the passage in which it appears will help immeasurably understanding it.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus tells the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18), it follows after Peter’s question, “how many times shall I forgive?” The parable functions as a metaphor to answer this question and promote an adequate response.

Finally, how does the parable compare to its counterparts in the other Synoptic Gospels? When a parable occurs in more than one of the Gospels it is valuable to compare the context of the parable in each book and how the parable is treated in the other Gospel accounts. Stiller upholds this idea by stating, “Look for other connections to the synoptic Gospels...look to see how they line up with each other, how each one treats a parable and where he locates it within the text.”<sup>59</sup> The parable of the sower found in Matthew 13 and Mark 4 have very similar contexts and information about the crowds

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<sup>58</sup> Norman Hope, “Bases for Understanding: The Interpretation of Christ’s Parables,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 6, no 3 (July 1952): 306.

<sup>59</sup> Brian Stiller, “Preaching Parables to Postmoderns” (DMin diss., Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2002), 40.

gathered by the sea. The account in Luke 8, has slightly differing information about some of the crowds, particularly about Jesus' disciples and the women who began following Jesus and even identifying three women by name.

### Understand the Cultural Background

The cultural context is important for the interpretation of parables. A parable can only mean what it once meant. Kenneth Bailey believes that researching the cultural background of the parable is key to understanding the original meaning of the parables.

The parables confront the exegete with what can be called the cultural problem. When studying the apostle Paul, one is dealing with theology expressed in conceptual language. But in the case of parables, their theology is expressed in stories about particular people who lived in a given cultural setting at a specific time in history. To understand the theology of parables, therefore, we must recapture the culture that informs the text. The culture of Synoptic parables is that of first-century Palestine.<sup>60</sup>

Cultural realities are important to understanding the meaning of a parable. In the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16, an understanding of the law of usury and commission are important to understanding the parable.

In studying the parables it would serve the preacher well to imagine sitting in the crowds in the setting that Jesus was telling the story. Doerkson offers this simple reminder to the reader, "Jesus lived among the Jewish people and most of the parables were drawn from the natural setting of the poor Jewish peasant."<sup>61</sup> Allow the parable to resonate in the minds of the crowd and appreciate the vividness of the story. Avoid

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<sup>60</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 39.

<sup>61</sup> Doerkson, "The Interpretation of Parables," 13.

breaking the parable down into tiny pieces of information but rather hear the story as a whole to grasp its full meaning and implication.

Sense the surprise when expectations are shattered and the listeners become upset when their expectations are not met. Brian Stiller reminds the reader, “watch for the unexpected. An important aspect of a parable’s nature is the element of surprise.”<sup>62</sup> In the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20), when the last minute workers receive the same wage as those who worked all day, sense the dissatisfaction, the unfairness for the all-day labourers and yet the joy for the last minute hires. The hearers are confronted with a complete unexpected employer from what they are used to having.

#### Understand the Main Point of the Parable

It is important to isolate the main idea of the parable. Osborne puts it in this way, “determine the main points of the parable. Often the clue comes in the context itself.”<sup>63</sup> Sometimes the main point is located in the introduction and sometimes it can be found in the concluding thoughts. The main point can also be found in the conversations prior to the actual telling of the parable.

Blomberg will point out that there are differing categories to discerning the main points of parables. Some parables will have one main point, while others may contain more than one. The following table has been composed to illustrate Blomberg’s findings.

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<sup>62</sup> Stiller, “Preaching Parables to Postmoderns,” 39.

<sup>63</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 247.

**Table 2.2. Blomberg's Categorization of Parables**

Category	Examples	Scripture
Simple 3-point parable	The prodigal son The two debtors The ten virgins The wheat and tares	Lk 15:11-32 Lk 7:41-43 Mt 25:1-13 Mt 13:24-30; 36-43
Complex 3-point parable	The sower The good Samaritan The talents The labourers in the vineyard	Mk 4, Mt 13, Lk 8 Lk 10:25-37 Mt 25:14-30, Lk 19:12-27 Mt 20:1-16
2-point parable	The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector The Two Builders The Rich Fool The Unjust Judge	Lk 18:9-14 Mt 7:24-27, Lk 6:47-49 Lk 12:16-21 Lk 18:1-8
1-point parable	The Hidden Treasure & the Pearl of Great Price The Tower-BUILDER & the Warring King The Mustard Seed and the Leaven	Mt 13:44-46 Lk 14:28-43 Lk 13:18-22

*Source:* Adapted from Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

Each of the main points of the parable is related to the wider context. The main points will always draw the parable back to the theme of the Kingdom of God.

### Conclusion

This portion of the paper was to provide a general overview of the overall direction of this paper and to provide a theological foundation of the terms, Kingdom of God and the Parables. It is important to have an adequate understanding of the scriptures as it pertains to the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' use of the parables as a preaching tool He was able to make an impact on His hearers. In recognizing the central message

of Jesus and in the using His preaching tool of parables and contextualizing them in the postmodern context today it is the desired outcome that more people today will be able to identify and grasp the message of the Kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

This literature review will utilize the following headings to assess the various writings as it pertains to this thesis. The first portion will look at the literature discussing the theology of the Kingdom of God and how it relates to the church today. The second segment will review the literature on the parables of Jesus as they relate to the Kingdom of God. The third section will identify writers on postmodernity and will interact with the writers as to how postmodernism affects theology, the life of the church and its people. The fourth section will discuss the area of preaching especially concerning biblical interpretation and sermon preparation as relevant to the parables of Jesus and the sermon delivery of the Kingdom Parables to the postmodern context. The final portion of this chapter will provide an interaction with the Literature as it pertains to postmodernity and its effects on preaching and the preaching context.

### **Literature Review: Kingdom of God**

*The Kingdom of God in America* by H. Richard Niebuhr attempts to analyze the history and theology of the Kingdom of God through the lens of American Christianity. Niebuhr shows the development and movement of Christianity in America. It is necessary to state that though the writer and thesis project will find its roots in the Canadian context many of the themes and ideas will transcend the border as the

postmodern worldview impacts Western, North American mindsets. The book tracks the Christian movement through the United States and then parallels how the Kingdom of God took on a variety of meanings. Take for example, in the early period of American Christianity the “Kingdom of God” meant “sovereignty of God,” then during the Great Awakening the “Kingdom of God” was understood as the “reign of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Eventually Niebuhr would come to a scathing remark about the American theology of God’s sovereignty by stating, “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of Christ without a cross.”<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr warns of the dangers of failing to acknowledge God’s ultimate sovereignty and warns against Christians becoming too accommodating to the world around them.

This book interacts with the thesis by providing a reminder that any attempt to define the Kingdom of God must also take into consideration the current state of Christianity along with a firm understanding of the surrounding cultural practices. Even though this book is seventy-five years removed, Niebuhr’s observations about pluralism and its interaction with Christianity are very relevant to the discussion of postmodernism today. Of intrigue is that Niebuhr’s shows the narrative structure of the Bible and how God brings about his plan of the Kingdom. As one tries to define and understand the Kingdom of God today, one needs to do so with an understanding of postmodernism. Postmodernism challenges any metanarrative that has the authority to make sense of life. Also during times when interest in the Kingdom of God arises, Christians have a tendency to move from a compartmentalization of the faith to a more holistic view seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1937), 53.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, 193.

how the gospel transforms all spheres of life. Therefore the Kingdom of God encompasses the fullness of human existence to bring healing and restoration where there is sickness, brokenness and hopelessness.

*The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* by Geerhardus Vos is a comprehensive overview of the Kingdom of God. Vos observes that the Old Testament does not demonstrate a future vision of the Kingdom of God but rather that the Kingdom of God was “Israel in a national and temporal sense.”<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, Vos develops Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom but he does not bring forward the Old Testament Jewish expectation of the Kingdom that the Jews in the first century Palestine would have anticipated.

Vos offers a good foundation in this book for an understanding of the Kingdom of God. He introduces the dual aspect of the Kingdom of God, namely the present and the future. Vos also believes the Kingdom of God is about the supremacy of God over all things. “Undoubtedly the kingship of God, as his recognized and applied supremacy, is intended to pervade and control the whole of human life in all its forms of existence. Whenever one of these spheres comes under the controlling influence of the principle of the divine supremacy and glory, and this outwardly reveals itself, there we can truly say that the kingdom of God has become manifest.”<sup>4</sup>

Vos makes a very important note that although every sphere of humanity falls under the supremacy of God and the Kingdom, these spheres are not subject to the visible

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<sup>3</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1903), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, 87-88.

church.<sup>5</sup> Vos dismisses the notion of a church-centered approach to culture. As the postmodern world pushes back against authority, at one point in time, the church was a source of authority in the secular world. As Vos dismisses the church-centered approach to culture this resonates with postmoderns who no longer view the church as a place of authority in many spheres outside of religion.

*The Kingdom of God* by Stephen Um is a small booklet that is part of a series of confessional statements from the Gospel Coalition. Um opens his book stating, “contemporary people have difficulty with authority,”<sup>6</sup> and this plays right into the postmodern rejection of authority.

Um explores how the Bible uses the term “Kingdom of God” and looks at the theology of the Kingdom in creation and walks through the major movements of the Old Testament and New Testament. Um also incorporates how the Christian identity and Christian community are all tied to the Kingdom of God. As postmodernism rejects authority, it is of interest to see Um’s perspective as he writes, “the church does not have any juridical authority in the city/state public square, but that does not mean that the church ought to stay on the periphery. The church does have the responsibility to act in mercy and to engage our community with deeds of social justice.”<sup>7</sup>

Another book that contributes to the discussion of the Kingdom of God is *The Kingdom of God (Theology in Community)* edited by Christopher Morgan and Robert

<sup>5</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Um, *The Kingdom of God*, The Gospel Coalition Booklets, ed. D.A. Carson and Timothy Keller (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), Loc: 129, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Um, *The Kingdom of God*, Loc: 330, Kindle.

Peterson. This collaboration of writers helps provide a comprehensive understanding of the Kingdom of God.

This book concurs with others sources that the Kingdom of God is understood as the reign of God and the realm of God. The book walks through the Old Testament and views the Kingdom in the context of the covenants. The Kingdom in the New Testament is seen as a present reality in the healing and exorcisms of Jesus. In the final chapter Anthony Bradley explores the ethical implications of the Kingdom of God. With that he places a heavy emphasis love, “the primary operating praxis and character of the kingdom of God is love.”<sup>8</sup> One of the features of postmodernism is the rejection of reason as a means to truth. The expression of love is beyond reason and logic and is geared more toward intuition, experience and emotion which postmodernism embraces as a means towards truth.

George Ladd’s writings on the Kingdom of God shaped the theological framework for this thesis. In *The Presences of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* by George E. Ladd helps one to see how the rule of God brings both the Old Testament and New Testament together. One of Ladd’s major contributions is his view that the Kingdom of God was both a present and future reality. Ladd defines the Kingdom of God as “the reign of God active in human history, in fulfillment of the Old Testament hope in the historical mission of Jesus, which must come to eschatological consummation at the Parousia of Jesus.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony Bradley, “The Kingdom Today” in *Kingdom of God: Theology in Community*, ed. Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Loc: 4436, Kindle.

<sup>9</sup> George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 36.

Ladd provides some basic foundations for sermon preparation as it pertains to the parables of Jesus and the Kingdom. Ladd also believed that the church is intertwined with the Kingdom, the Kingdom creates the church, the church witnesses the kingdom and is the custodian of the kingdom.<sup>10</sup> This distinction helps Christians understand that there is an individual and corporate nature for a citizen of the Kingdom and as well to be reminded of the present reality with a future anticipation.

In *Kingdom Come: How Jesus Wants to Change the World*, Allen Wakabayashi challenges the reader to question whether their worldview reflects the unfolding plan of God's Kingdom. The writer attempts to help the reader have a broader perspective of the gospel and the Kingdom. The gospel is not simply a plan of salvation to ensure a place in heaven but the gospel is also the Kingdom and therefore it is more than just being saved and going to heaven as Wakabayashi writes, "the good news of the kingdom of God is that God came to fix it all – our relationship with God, our relationships with each other and the harmony of the created order. So Jesus died not simply so that lost individuals could go to heaven but so that all creation would be redeemed."<sup>11</sup> Wakabayashi hopes to transform how Christians view the gospel with a Kingdom tone and subsequently how that gospel is proclaimed in mission and evangelism to represent the Kingdom.

One area that Wakabayashi does fall short is that he does not discuss the Kingdom of God in the "now" and "not yet" perspective. Wakabayashi is more concerned with the "now" and how the Kingdom of God interacts with the surrounding culture as people

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<sup>10</sup> George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 264-274.

<sup>11</sup> Allen Wakabayashi, *Kingdom Come: How Jesus Wants to Change the World* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 34.

engage in sharing the Kingdom Gospel. The church and its people are called to live as a community that bears witness to the Kingdom of God.

### **Literature Review: Parables of Jesus**

CH Dodd's work, *Parables of the Kingdom*, is considered a classic resource for any study or work on the parables of Jesus. Dodd's main goal was to provide a proper hermeneutic of the parables. He writes, "the task of the interpreter of the parables is to find out, if he can, the setting of a parable in the situation contemplated by the Gospels, and hence the application which would support itself to one who stood in that situation."<sup>12</sup> In other words Dodd merely stressed that to correctly interpret the parables it would have to make sense to the original hearers before it makes sense to twenty-first century audience today. Dodd is overly concerned to interpret and explore what Jesus' parables meant to the original hearers that he completely negates the notion of parables containing any allegory.

Dodd's writing also demonstrates that the central theme of the parables was the Kingdom of God and that his main concern was the present kingdom not the future kingdom. Dodd was concerned about the proper understanding of eschatology but he limits himself to seeing the parables as a realized eschatology that the future kingdom is present now in the person and teaching of Jesus. "God is confronting them in His kingdom, power and glory. This world has become the scene of a divine drama, in which the eternal issues are laid bare. It is the hour of decision. It is realized eschatology."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> CH Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 14.

<sup>13</sup> CH Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 197-198.

As a result Dodd is very rigid in observing the parables in light of his "realized eschatology." He places the parables in two categories, parables of crises and parables of growth. The parables of crises are concerned with the parables that address being watchful or alert such as the parable of the ten virgins, the thief in the night, and of the faithful and unfaithful servants. These parables are portraying the certainty of someone who will come soon and their arrival is crucial for the future of those who are waiting. Dodd argues that these parables are not about the second coming of Jesus or the crisis of readiness, but rather that Jesus' arrival in his first coming has already created a crisis.

The parables of growth are concerned with the parables that emphasize influence of the kingdom in causing spiritual growth. Parables such as the soil and the yeast are examples given by Dodd. Again because Dodd is concerned with the present he does not view these parables as growth being a process of development and then consummated by Christ's second coming. Rather he sees that Christ's initial arrival as the climax and the growth has already been happening outside the effort of man. With that said Dodd's work is a classic as he attempts to regain the original setting and meaning of the parables in the ministry of Jesus.

Craig Blomberg provides a very comprehensive overview of the interpretation of parables in his work, *Interpreting the Parables*. Blomberg traces the historical approaches of interpreting parables and he holds to a conservative approach that Jesus's parables on some level are allegorical, instead of outright rejecting allegory. He states, "parables, as they stand in the Gospels, are much more allegorical than is usually acknowledged."<sup>14</sup> With that Blomberg does well to differentiate between allegory, a

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<sup>14</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), Loc: 161, Kindle.

literary device to draw a person into deeper levels of meaning and allegorizing, where the "reader reads into the text different levels of meaning."<sup>15</sup> As Blomberg believes that some form of allegory is found in the parables he limits allegorical interpretation by claiming that the interpretation must be understood by the first-century audience before the twenty-first century hearers.

Blomberg also discusses the strengths and limitations of the three schools of New Testament interpretation, literary criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism. Literary criticism examines the parables using an allegorical approach, which was stated in the previous paragraph. Form criticism explores the context of a passage and categorizes it by its form, whether it is a parable, story, miracle, and proverb and so on.<sup>16</sup> By properly identifying the form, the interpreter employs the appropriate interpretation tools for that form. Redaction criticism studies how the Gospels were edited and the underlying or hidden meanings each Gospel writer was trying to get across.<sup>17</sup> Take for example a parable spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew can have a completely different meaning from the same parable found in the Gospel of Luke.

Lastly Blomberg does an excellent job providing insight to the parables for theological reflection and even sermon preparation. Blomberg employs the form criticism to illustrate how each parable attempts to make a significant point. In general, He divides the parables into categories of three point parables, two point parables and one point parables. Blomberg demonstrates how the structure of the parables indicates the

<sup>15</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Loc: 525, Kindle.

<sup>16</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Loc: 692, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Loc: 979, Kindle.

intention of communication and the main point each parable is trying to make. Blomberg concludes his book with the theological implication of the parables that Jesus' parables are related to the central theme of the Kingdom of God.<sup>18</sup>

*The Parables of Jesus* by William Barclay carefully interprets individual parables. Barclay believed two things were necessary for proper interpretation. The first task to proper interpretation is "to understand any parable properly we need to have a knowledge of the circumstances in which it was spoken."<sup>19</sup> Barclay advocated for understanding the parables on the terms and conditions of the original hearers. Secondly, "it is obviously impossible to find the whole of the Christian faith in any one parable."<sup>20</sup> Barclay contends that parables have a specific time and place and was used to illustrate a specific truth that was required for that particular need. It is foolish and incorrect to read timeless theological Christian truths back into the parables that may have never been intended.

Barclay explores the language and customs of the times and explains what the original hearers of each parable would have understood. He then arrives at an appropriate interpretation for today. Barclay takes an individual parable and identifies the theme, explains what the original hearer understood through language and customs and provides a proper interpretation for today.

This book was a very useful resource for the interpretation of parables and in the development of the sermon manuscripts for this thesis project. Barclay focuses on thirty

<sup>18</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Loc: 2916, Kindle.

<sup>19</sup> William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>20</sup> William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus*, 16.

parables and each parable stands as a chapter on its own. Each chapter reads as its own commentary and sermon on that particular parable.

*Parables of Jesus* by James Montgomery Boice wrote this book as a result of his own preparations to preach through the parables of Jesus. Boice examines twenty-two parables and each chapter covers one parable. Overall, Boice categorizes the twenty-two parables based on their main application. His categories are parables on the Kingdom, Salvation, Wisdom and Folly, Christian Life and Judgment, which Boice claims to be uniquely his own.<sup>21</sup> While these categorizations prove helpful they are also a flawed as some parables can be mislabeled or even fall under more than one category. Each chapter reads as its own sermon and this book proved to be valuable resource in the preparation for the sermons in this thesis project.

Robert Capon's work, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* was at first three individual books, now comprised as one. As one can surmise from the title, Capon breaks down the parables of Jesus into three categories, Kingdom, Grace and Judgment. These categories arise out of Capon's interpretation of Jesus' main thrust of the parable and their order of appearance in the synoptic Gospels. Because Capon uses these categories it is difficult to look at each of the parables without prejudice or reading into the parables one of these three categories.

Capon also employs a unique perspective he calls, "left handed power and right-handed power." Right-handed power is understood as, direct, straight-line, intervening

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<sup>21</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Parables of Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1983), Loc: 98, Kindle.

power.<sup>22</sup> This is the notion that God would just intervene and forcefully impose His will. Left-handed power is seen as "paradoxical power: power that looks for all the world like weakness, intervention that seems indistinguishable from nonintervention."<sup>23</sup> God seems passive and almost indecisive in how He handles His affairs. Capon believes God uses left-handed power bring about the Kingdom of God and as a result he interprets the parables from this same lens.

Capon's book can also be used simply as a resource for insight into a particular parable or grouping of parables. It serves as a useful tool in the sermon preparation as each chapter can be viewed as a sermon based upon that parable.

*Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* written by Klyne Snodgrass is exactly as the title implies, a very comprehensive guide to the parables. Snodgrass believes parables are stories with expanded analogies whose purpose is to make a rhetorical point.<sup>24</sup>

Snodgrass provides some good insight for how parables should be interpreted. He suggests the interpreter needs to be willing to hear and respond appropriately, analyze each parable thoroughly, to listen to the parable without presupposition, to consider Jesus' original audience was an oral culture and to hear the parables as Jesus' first hearers would.<sup>25</sup> These insights prove useful for the interpretation process.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapid, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), Loc: 187, Kindle.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, Loc: 203, Kindle.

<sup>24</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), Loc: 143, Kindle.

<sup>25</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent*, Loc: 669-700, Kindle.

Snodgrass suggests parables fall under the following classifications: aphoristic saying, similitudes, interrogative parables, double indirect narrative parables, juridical parables, single indirect parables, and "how much more" parables. All this to offer a critique that these classifications seem overboard and completely unnecessary. As Snodgrass has suggested parables need to make sense to the original hearers, would these same original hearers be overly concerned with these categories of parables? An original audience with limited abilities to read or write would not have much regard for these classifications.

It does come across that Snodgrass is more concerned with the modern audiences of today rather than the original hearers. Not only with his use of the classifications of parables but his general lack of insight to the cultural information that would prove important. He does not make much reference to the social dynamics of the first century world in which these parables were spoken and have the cultural roots.

Kenneth Bailey's work, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* was originally two books that are now comprised as one. The first portion, *Poet and Peasant*, contains a history of how parables have been interpreted and describes Bailey's unique method to approaching parables. Bailey examines parallelism as vital to understand the climax and main points of the parable. The other unique approach is what he calls the "oriental exegesis."

The culture that informs the text of the Gospel parables can be delineated in a relatively precise manner by bringing together three tools. The culture of contemporary conservative peasants must be examined to see what the parables mean in their setting. Oriental versions need to be studied to see how Oriental churchmen through the centuries have translated the text. Ancient literature pertinent to the parables must be read *with* the insights gained from these other two sources, not in isolation from them. This text must be examined against the background of information gleaned from these three sources. These three tools

need to be used *along with* and not in isolation from the other skills of modern scholarship.<sup>26</sup>

Bailey demonstrates his approach using eight parables found in the Gospel of Luke. In the second portion *Through Peasant Eyes*, Bailey continues his work through ten other parables all found in Luke.

The main limitation of this work is that Bailey only studies the parables found in the Gospel of Luke, he does not employ or explore his methodology in the other Gospels. The second limitation is that while Bailey's approach for a literary-cultural approach is insightful, he sometimes reconstructs the social background at the expense of the text and context of the parable itself.

### **Literature Review: Postmodernity**

*Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* by J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh helps the reader understand the modern worldview and the shift to the postmodern thinking. The book seeks to answer four main worldviews in postmodern thought, where are we, who are we, what's wrong, what's the remedy?<sup>27</sup> The authors provide an overview of the failures of the Christian metanarrative by taking advantage of people through the use of science, technology and wealth.

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<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 11.

The book believes that the postmodern worldview leaves people with a sense of hopelessness. The solution for Christians to be effective in the postmodern culture is not to stand over and against culture but to have a posture of listening.

What we need, however, is not an attitude of judgment, as if we stand over against our culture. Whatever claims to distinctiveness Christians like to make, we are all implicated in the crisis of modernity and we all need healing. But for healing, we need understanding. We need to listen sensitively and emphatically to the cry of our age, especially for the resonance of that cry within ourselves. Only then will we be able to discern the contours of the emerging postmodern worldview.<sup>28</sup>

The book tries to guide the reader to live in obedience to Christ beyond the modern ideas and into the postmodern world. One area of importance that Middleton and Walsh addresses is the need to be grounded and rooted in the Bible. In order for Christians to interact with postmodernity well, “the first and indispensable step we need to take is to immerse ourselves in the Bible as the nonnegotiable, canonical foundation of our faith.”<sup>29</sup>

Middleton and Walsh offer a fair assessment of postmodernism and discuss the ways in which Christianity could benefit from listening to the critiques of postmodernism. Christianity should not dismiss all postmodern thought as an attack on Christianity but rather embrace an empathetic listening posture. Middleton and Walsh also advocate that the gospel message should not become so postmodern or contextual that it loses the essential message and truth. This becomes a challenging task to the preacher to be able to contextualize the scriptures for the postmodern listeners in the congregation all the while not going to either extreme and as a result lose the truth of the Scriptures.

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<sup>28</sup> Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be*, 174.

*A Primer on Postmodernism* by Stanley Grenz introduces the reader to the ideas and people who have helped give shape to the postmodern era. Grenz makes comparisons between modernity and postmodernity ultimately proposes “postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism. Gone is the belief that every day, in every way, we are getting better and better.”<sup>30</sup>

Grenz believes that the Christian faith needs to stand its ground against the postmodern notion of rejecting the metanarrative, “because of our faith in Christ, we cannot totally affirm the central tenet of postmodernism as defined by Lyotard – the rejection of the metanarrative.”<sup>31</sup> This is because Christians believe in the grand narrative of God who creates the world, then saves the world and awaits its final consummation of the Kingdom when God restores His intentions for creation.

Grenz also provides attributes of postmodernism that have common ground with Christianity. Grenz believes that postmodernism’s view of knowledge has a common ground with the Christian view of knowledge, “the Christian faith entails a denial that the rational, scientific method is the sole measure of truth. We affirm that certain aspects of truth lie beyond reason and cannot be fathomed by reason.”<sup>32</sup>

Grenz also argues that the following three areas also provide a mutual understanding between postmodernism and Christianity. The post-individualistic gospel, the individual no longer takes centre stage but affirms the needs for community. The post-rationalistic gospel, people are more than just rational and intellectual beings and

<sup>30</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 164.

<sup>32</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 166.

there needs to be room for the irrational and mysterious. Finally the post-dualistic gospel, the individual is more than just mind and matter, but there are emotions which lead to an interest in treating the human person as a unified whole.<sup>33</sup>

*Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thoughts and Culture* by Gene E. Veith tries to connect the current culture of postmodernism and its interaction with the contemporary Christian faith. Veith believes that “the church has always had to confront its culture and to exist in tension with the world. To ignore the culture is to risk irrelevance; to accept the culture uncritically is to risk syncretism and unfaithfulness.”<sup>34</sup>

Veith does well to provide a foundation for understanding postmodernism. Veith offers a background of the history of Western Civilization to trace postmodernism’s roots. He begins in the premodern world and states, “the premodern phase of Western Civilization people believed in the supernatural. Individuals and the culture as a whole believed in God (or gods). Life in this world owed its existence and meaning to a spiritual realm beyond the sense.”<sup>35</sup> Veith tracks the development of postmodernism from the premodern worldview to the modern and finally concludes with the postmodern culture today.

Of particular importance is Veith’s observations of postmodernism’s interaction with Christianity today. Veith is cautiously optimistic about postmodernism and Christianity as he writes,

The end of the modern era opens up genuine opportunities for Biblical Christianity. However, instead of squarely facing postmodern condition, many

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 169-172.

<sup>34</sup> Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 29.

Christians succumb to postmodernism plaguing the rest of the culture. Conservative and Evangelical Christians did well, for the most part, in avoiding the temptations of modernism. Now with their modernistic enemy defeated, they are letting their guard down, naively giving in to the new cultural climate. Many supposedly conservative churches now alter not only their style but their message in an attempt to appeal to contemporary society.<sup>36</sup>

As a result Veith offers a solution to his cautious optimism, “to be relevant to the postmodern era, the church must simply proclaim the truth of God’s Word, the validity of God’s law, and the sufficiency of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Veith’s comments are of particular interest as this thesis project attempts to clarify what is the “gospel of Jesus Christ”? The “gospel of Jesus Christ” is simply that the Kingdom of God is at hand. As the dynamic between church and postmodern culture continues it is evident that there needs to be a starting point that is found in the message of Jesus, namely the Kingdom of God. If Christians do not know what Jesus taught how can one engage our postmodern world today with this truth?

In his book, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*, David Lyon insightfully demonstrates how the world has changed and how that change has impacted how people live out faith today. The church will always find itself in a fluid, dynamic relationship with culture and as a result the church needs to determine how it will interact with the surrounding environment. Lyon states, “Religious life is not shrinking, collapsing, or evaporating, as predicted by modernistic secularization theorists. Rather, in deregulated and postinstitutional forms, the religious life draws upon multifarious resources with consequences, for better or worse, that are hard to predict, but that cry out

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<sup>36</sup> Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 209-210.

<sup>37</sup> Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 210.

for understanding.”<sup>38</sup> This is his call for how the church will engage the postmodern worldview that there needs to be a renewal of understanding.

Lyon argues, as postmodernism continues to shape our understanding of authority, identity, time and space it ultimately impacts how one views, understands and even revises their religious beliefs and practices. He writes, “the postmodern places question marks over older, modern assumptions about authority, and it foregrounds questions of identity. It does so because at a profound social level, time and space, the very matrix of human social life, are undergoing radical restructuring.”<sup>39</sup> This restructuring leads to the search for answers and those answers lead to religious expressions and experiences. Lyon observes how the rise of communication and information technologies and the rise of consumerism factor into the cultural understanding of authority, identity, time and space, which he believes impacts religious beliefs.

Lyon looks closely at the dynamics of postmodernism and it effects both positively and negatively, on the Christian faith. It is a sobering notion that Christianity cannot minimize or avoid the profound impact that culture has upon Christianity. He believes that with the passing of modernity, the Christian faith will find difficulty in addressing the institution and conventional models of faith but this will allow for a refreshing take on Christianity, “far from foreclosing the possibilities for appropriate

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<sup>38</sup> David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000), 19.

<sup>39</sup> David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 11.

Christian living, these conditions actually open the door to new variations, new combinations of authentic and responsible action.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Literature Review: Preaching**

In *Preaching With Variety: How to Re-Create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres*, Jeffrey Arthurs deal with the subject of biblical preaching and states, “a sermon’s content should explain and apply the Word of God as it is found in a biblical text, and a sermon’s form should unleash the impact of that text.”<sup>41</sup> Arthurs walks through the various genres of the Bible and provides insight for the sermon preparation within each genre. Of particular importance is Arthurs’ chapter 6 entitled, *Parables: Hidden Land Mines*. This chapter deals directly with preaching the parables of Jesus. Arthurs helps to define parables, their purpose and how they were used by Jesus as tool for preaching various sources. Arthurs gives this wonderful insight, “parables teach theology, they also prompt us to respond to that theology. They do so through three rhetorical implications that are embedded in the realism of parables. The first is identification...the second is imagination...the third they are explosive but concealed.”<sup>42</sup>

He provides some guidelines for interpretation and then offers valuable insight for the preacher today. Arthurs suggests that in preaching parables there is great freedom to

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<sup>40</sup> David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 143.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety: How to Re-Create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 13.

<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety*, 108.

use numerous devices to produce numerous effects and that there is not a simple set of rules for preaching the text.<sup>43</sup>

Arthurs does provide some guidelines for preachers. He instructs that if Jesus makes an obvious point, preachers should make those same points clear. If the point is not so clear, it is not necessary to make things clearer but to allow the parable to leave us uncertain. Arthurs also reminds preachers to keep the plot simple, keep the characters simple and react along the way.<sup>44</sup> Arthurs' main goal is correctly handle Biblical genres in order that preaching can vary to uphold the biblical text.

*Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* by Craig Blomberg is a useful tool for preachers. Blomberg identifies fifteen parables of Jesus and provides fifteen sermons based on those parables. Each parable reads as a chapter in his book and proves to be a very useful resource for preaching material. Blomberg reaffirms his categories of three point, two point and one point parables from his previous work, *Interpreting the Parables*.

Blomberg presents seven presuppositions, parables all relate to the Kingdom of God, are authentically from Jesus, main characters represent something, intended to both reveal and conceal truth, require some contemporizing, require interpretation in their contexts.<sup>45</sup> Blomberg asserts that there is one main point for each main character in each parable. This is the safeguard to avoid reading too much into the parable.

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<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety*, 118.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety*, 128.

<sup>45</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2004), 23-25.

*Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating That Connects* edited by Scott Gibson was an important catalyst for this thesis project. Of particular importance was chapter 2, *The New Testament in the New Millennium* by Vic Gordon. Gordon states, “I am convinced we evangelicals have neglected Jesus the Preacher in ways that have impoverished our own preaching.”<sup>46</sup> It is the challenge that in order to reclaim the pulpit, preachers need to reconnect with the greatest preacher who has ever lived, Jesus Christ. Gordon continues with great conviction that preachers should preach the same message as Jesus did. So it begs the question what is the content of the message of Jesus? “Jesus proclaimed good news about the Kingdom of God...most Christians I run into do not know this!”<sup>47</sup>

Another chapter that is of great importance is chapter 10, *The Postmodern Mind and Preaching* by Jeffrey Arthurs. This chapter discusses preaching to the postmodern mindset and offers a comforting disclaimer at its outset, “people of the modern generation and people of the postmodern generation (and for that matter, people of the premodern generation) are more similar than dissimilar.”<sup>48</sup>

Arthurs advocates that preaching content needs to remain biblically true, but the ways to communicate the truth must vary to reach the postmodern hearer, “maintain the message but adapt the form of the leading - the communication methods.”<sup>49</sup> Arthurs

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<sup>46</sup> Vic Gordon, “The New Testament in the New Millennium,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communication That Connects*, ed. Scott Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2004), 40.

<sup>47</sup> Vic Gordon, “The New Testament in the New Millennium,” 44.

<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communication That Connects*, ed. Scott Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2004), 177.

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 189.

believes that preaching should be done with a more personal and conversational approach because postmodern value natural communication and it addresses the postmodern skepticism of authority. He writes, “personal communication adapts to the postmodern mind by framing authority in a context of humility, emphasizing experience and fostering dialogue.”<sup>50</sup> This chapter is very helpful for the preachers to carefully consider how to engage the postmodern hearers in order that the truth of God’s Word may be preached, heard and understood.

Graham Johnston’s work, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, demonstrates how a preacher can adjust their style of preaching to suite their audience without compromising the biblical message. Johnston’s goal is to help preachers communicate clearly and with relevance to the current culture and the postmodern world.

The first portion of Johnston’s work provides an important overview of postmodernism. In doing so, Johnston states preachers need to reach postmoderns and all the while remaining faithful to the Word of God, “preacher must reach the listener, a fellow human being, with the message of Christ, and at the same time uphold the Word of God, faithfully and with integrity. The best biblical communicators will not sacrifice either burden but will allow these dual desires to fuel one another.”<sup>51</sup>

The remaining portion of the book offers strategies for preachers to be able to communicate the Scriptures to the postmodern audience. It is important for preachers to understand their listeners and how they think, hear and approach their worldview.

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<sup>50</sup>Jeffrey Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 195.

<sup>51</sup>Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 18-19.

Johnston offers valuable insight regarding the cultural worldview of postmodernism and how the preacher can effectively speak the Scriptures into that worldview.

### **An Interaction with the Literature:**

#### **Characteristics of Postmodernity**

Postmodernism is a broad concept and ever-changing that it is difficult to reduce postmodernity to a single definition. To date, one of the best definitions found is in Graham Johnston's book, as he quotes David Cook: "postmodernism moves beyond 'modern,' scientifically based view of the world by blending a skepticism about technology, objectivity, absolutes, and total explanations with a stress on image, and appearance, personal interpretation, pleasure and the exploration of every spiritual and material perspective."<sup>52</sup> Rather than adhere to this definition it would be better to discuss the characteristics of postmodernism, "but postmodernism is better understood descriptively and by its features, rather than by definition."<sup>53</sup> The following are some characteristics of postmodern as found in the some of the previous literature on postmodernity.

Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Postmodernism is more like a continuation of the modern era but more inclined to be a reaction that is negative. Grenz sees postmodernism as "the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launched under the conditions of modernity.

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<sup>52</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 24.

Therefore, to understand postmodern thinking, we must view it in the context of the modern world that gave it birth and against which it is reacting.”<sup>54</sup>

Postmodernism has lost hope and trust and is characterized by pessimism. Middleton and Walsh state, “the onset of postmodernity could be described as the loss of enthusiasm in the grounding convictions of modernity.”<sup>55</sup> David Lyon puts it in this way, postmodern deals with, “questions of identity. It does so because at a profound social level, time and space, the very matrix of human social life, are undergoing radical restructuring.”<sup>56</sup> The result of this restructuring leaves people without hope. Graham Johnston concurs with this notion by writing, “postmodern people simply live in the quandary of not knowing and of potential meaninglessness.”<sup>57</sup>

Postmodernism also places great value on the plurality of voices. Grenz writes, postmodernism “abandons the quest for a unified grasp of objective reality. It asserts that the world has no centre, only differing viewpoints and perspectives.”<sup>58</sup> These voices attempt to bring power, equality and justice to all people groups. Graham Johnston puts it in this way, “postmodernity rejects all worldviews because any one way of understanding the world will inevitably leave out someone, leading to marginalization and oppression. Tolerance becomes the balancing point to keep power equally distributed.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Middleton, J. Richard and Brian Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 33.

Another characteristic of postmodernism is the abandoning of objective truth. It is not that truth does not exist, it is more that one cannot be objective about truth.

Knowledge is always written by the winners in history and in essence “knowledge is intractably perspectival.”<sup>60</sup> Johnston concurs with Arthurs as he writes, “postmodernism would argue that you can’t divorce yourself from the interpretive process of knowing; therefore, your own perceptions, understandings, bias and presuppositions will always taint your conclusions about what’s true.”<sup>61</sup>

Postmodernism rejects the concept of the metanarrative. The metanarrative is the grand sweeping story of humanity that gives meaning and explanation to life. It answers the larger questions of the human condition and existence. The Bible is considered a metanarrative because it provides an interpretation to life and an explanation of the human condition. Therefore postmodernism rejects the Bible narrative. Postmodern thinkers believe metanarratives are constructed for the “interests of those who have the power and authority to make such universal pronouncements.”<sup>62</sup> Metanarratives are viewed as privileging one over another and the result is often violence against persons.<sup>63</sup> Grenz also points out that the postmodernists resists “unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanations. It replaces these with a respect for difference and a celebration of the local and particular at the expense of the universal.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 182.

<sup>61</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Middleton, J. Richard and Brian Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 71.

<sup>63</sup> Middleton, J. Richard and Brian Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 72-73.

<sup>64</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 12.

The final characteristic of postmodernism to be explored is the dismissal of authority. The rejection of the singular voice, the metanarrative and the objective truth, naturally leads to the rejection of authority. So the postmodern becomes their own authority and accepts only what they personally experience. Arthurs writes, “today we preach to a mind convinced that truth is socially constructed based on only one individual perspective. Ethical relativism follows epistemological relativism.”<sup>65</sup> Arthurs furthers this thought by quoting Toulmin, Rieke and Jank, *Introduction to Reasoning*. “if the individual’s self must be its own source of moral guidance, then...utility replaces duty; self-expression unseats authority, ‘being good’ becomes ‘feeling good.’”<sup>66</sup>

### Challenges of Preaching in the Postmodern Context

Postmodernism has had a great influence on the congregations of churches but to what degree one cannot be certain. The preacher today also needs to recognize how postmodernism has shaped their own understanding of scripture and preaching. Biblical preaching is important to the preacher who wants to communicate the word of God more effectively in the postmodern context. With the ever revolving door of “truth,” the preacher needs to be grounded in the absolute truth of scripture.

It is not clear all the implications postmodernism has on preaching. The humbling reality however is that postmodernism is both a blessing and a cursing to the preacher. One cannot ignore that postmodernism has an influence and at the same time one cannot

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<sup>65</sup> Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 183.

<sup>66</sup> Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 184.

go to the other extreme and classify postmodernism as the ultimate evil that threatens the church today.

Preachers today face the daunting task of preaching to their respective communities with varying worldviews. As a result of postmodernism's concern for every person's "truth," it is important for the preacher to understand what their members bring to the sermon and what their members hear and take to heart. Congregants listen to the sermon, understand them in their own ways and respond in their own ways. Johnston writes, "the preacher can no longer presume to be telling people how it is or setting people straight. To the contrary, people are seeking more of an experienced guide rather than a lecturer to lead them through the intricacies of life and faith."<sup>67</sup>

In reviewing the characteristics of postmodernism there arises some areas that preachers will need to overcome when preaching to a postmodern audience. As postmodernism is skeptical of objective truth, pluralism is a theme that comes to the surface. Pluralism is the notion there is more than one truth that is acceptable.

Following closely behind pluralism is relativism. Relativism is the idea that there are no absolute truths. Since postmoderns believe in giving equal voice to all groups and that no one group's claims can be absolute, hearers today will question whether or not what is being preached can be considered true. The audience will filter what is heard and compare it to the various number of 'truths' they interact with on a daily basis.

One of postmodernism's' characteristics is its response to modernism. The modern world relied on the scientific method and logical, sequential and linear thinking. Preaching in the modern world followed suit by offering a central thesis and three

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<sup>67</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 121.

supporting arguments for that thesis. With the shift to postmodernism, preaching takes on a different form, “the form of television is becoming the form of thinking for the postmodern mind. Linear reasoning with words is out, and experiencing flashes of images is in.”<sup>68</sup> Preaching should utilize the art of storytelling, as stories are less linear and have the power to move people.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, intuition is now on par and has equal standing with reason and logic. Oftentimes intuition responds in contrast to reason and logic. This issue affects the content and approach to sermons. Sermons often use logical homiletics and points made in a logical order to convince the hearers of a truth. Preachers now need to engage the heart (intuition) and illicit an emotional response of the listener. Preaching is no longer limited to the head, but must also impact the heart. Johnston advises, “internalize emotion...by getting in touch with the human element, the preacher connect with the heart of the listener.”<sup>70</sup>

Graham Johnston believes that one of the best approaches to postmodern audiences is to use the inductive method of preaching. “When a preacher actively engages the minds of listeners, not only is their attention captured, but they receive more through the joy of discovery as opposed to having ideas merely handed to them.”<sup>71</sup>

Another challenge for preaching to postmoderns is rejection of authority. The scriptures fall under scrutiny as to whether the Word of God should have authority over the lives people. Johnston writes it in this way, “gone are the days of an authoritarian

<sup>68</sup> Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 188.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 155-156.

<sup>70</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 162.

<sup>71</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 152.

stance, ‘It’s true because the Bible says so.’ To the contrary, people are seeking more of an experienced guide rather than a lecturer to lead them through the intricacies of life and faith.”<sup>72</sup>

The rejection of authority also impacts the preacher. The authority of the preacher is also called into question, “in relation to preaching, postmodern people will tend to perceive the preacher as voicing a personal viewpoint.”<sup>73</sup> Johnston goes on to reassure preachers that, “in speaking to your listeners, you cannot presume authority but you can endeavor to establish authority over time.”<sup>74</sup>

The tone of the preacher can help appease the notion of authority. Postmoderns tend to value the conversational tone and approach. Arthurs offers his take that a conversational tone will do well to grab the ear of the postmodern listener. “Postmodernists are socialized to value communication which is natural and modulated.”<sup>75</sup>

The last area of challenge for preaching is the rejection of metanarrative. Preachers must not discard the Biblical metanarrative to appease postmoderns but ensuring we are preaching the correct metanarrative. Christians have been and still are guilty of misusing and misapplying the biblical metanarrative, the problem is not the metanarrative, it is the Christians. Postmoderns are concerned that the voices of the marginalized or oppressed will not be heard, but the reality is that the bible addresses

<sup>72</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 121.

<sup>73</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 34.

<sup>74</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 95.

<sup>75</sup> Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” 194.

those voices in the metanarrative, it is the people of faith who have failed to follow through. Middleton and Walsh remind us that the metanarrative of scriptures is “sensitive to suffering...the purposes of God is to be shalom, compassion and justice...but the metanarrative depends on our response.”<sup>76</sup>

#### Why Preaching Parables are Effective for Postmoderns

Parables are able to attract and speak into the lives of postmoderns today. They demonstrate clearly the central message of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. This is a vital truth that all believers and nonbelievers need to hear and grasp. There are several ways that preaching parables can speak the wonderful message of the Gospel and the Kingdom to postmodern audiences.

Postmodernism rejects reason as the only sure way to discover truth and embraces the use of intuition and experience. Parables do not always make logical sense. It requires the listeners to think beyond reason and to embrace acting in ways that seem contrary to our logic.

Jesus uses parables to both conceal and reveal truth claims. Parables do not always put the truth front and center and it often requires internalization and reflection to discover the truth. Postmodern thought rejects the notion of truth being objective but more relative. In this way the parables allow postmoderns to discover the truth by not being so upfront with declarative truth but through the hearer reflecting and arriving at the conclusion themselves.

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<sup>76</sup> Middleton, J. Richard and Brian Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 107.

Postmoderns are very skeptical of authority today. The belief is that knowledge was used as means of power and control. Jesus often used the parables as a means to discredit and usurp the current authority of the times. Many parables would speak to a time when the Kingdom comes in its fullness, that justice and righteousness will be foundational. Postmoderns can sympathize and embrace Jesus' message because it comes across as anti-authority.

Finally, the postmodern mindset discredits the larger metanarrative. The metanarrative is the grand sweeping story of humanity that provides meaning and the explanation of life. This poses a challenge to the general metanarrative of the Bible. The parables break down the metanarrative into small pieces. These smaller portions of the metanarrative are less offensive or threatening to postmoderns.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate to provide a review of the literature available on the subjects of the Kingdom of God, the Parables, Postmodernism and Preaching. While interacting with the literature there comes to the surface the following themes. The parables of Jesus are concerned with revealing or concealing the truth of the Kingdom of God. The postmodern context requires that preachers not compromise the truth of the parables but rather embrace the same methodology Jesus used to reach his hearers. Preaching the Kingdom parables in the postmodern context will prove to be a challenging task but one that has great rewards.

## CHAPTER 4:

### PROJECT DESIGN - PREACHING KINGDOM PARABLES

#### **Introduction**

The following chapter provides the design of the study and the research model which guides the project. The chapter will give a basic overview of the thesis project that was utilized. The appendix will include the actual elements of the project for reference.

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the thesis project is to examine if Christians in the postmodern context today can correctly identify and understand the central message of Jesus, “the Kingdom of God is near.” The current assumption is that many Christians today cannot identify the central message of Jesus and as a result they do not fully understand what the Kingdom of God is all about.

In order to correct this problem one simply needs to follow the example of Jesus. What did Jesus communicate in terms of the Kingdom and how did Jesus go about proclaiming the Kingdom? Jesus chose to use parables as his primary means to preach and teach about the Kingdom of God. This thesis project followed through by preaching through the various parables of Jesus in order to inform and transform Christian hearers to understand the Kingdom of God.

The thesis project began by introducing the concept of the Kingdom of God. It provided a glimpse into understanding what parables are. Finally the project used several

parables about the Kingdom of God and examined how they can be contextualized and preached for the postmodern audience. Through this project was the desire that those who hear the preaching of the Kingdom will be able to identify the central message of Jesus and live according to the principles Jesus sets forth. The writer was challenged with remaining faithful to preaching of the parables as a means to inform and transform believers to orient their lives towards a Kingdom paradigm.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The goal for the thesis project was to inform the focus group that the central message of Jesus' teaching was the Kingdom of God. This informing process occurred using the same preaching methodology of Jesus, the parables. The writer made use of preaching the parables to inform the focus group about the Kingdom of God.

The preaching of the parables utilized the expository preaching process along with Haddon Robinson's, *Big Idea of Preaching* methodology. The preaching preparation examined and exegeted the parables and presented the subject, complement, homiletical idea and the big idea as per Robinsons methodology. These notes can be found in the appendices of this project. The preaching considered how to communicate effectively to postmoderns by understanding postmodernity and its influences and examined how Jesus' method of parables and storytelling still have an impact in today's world.

Another objective for this project is after informing the hearings of this truth about the Kingdom, the writer hoped that not only will one be able to recognize the central message of Jesus, but that message transforms how one lives their lives according

to the Kingdom paradigm. It is not simply satisfactory for the preacher to inform the listeners but to invite the listeners into a posture of transformation so that the Word of God will make lasting change in their lives.

Finally this thesis project became a resource for future preaching opportunities in the church and in other preaching ministry opportunities. It is also the hope of the writer to adapt and revise this thesis project for a series of teaching lectures for seminary students for the purpose of preparing preachers to engage postmoderns.

### **Setting**

This project occurred during a weekend retreat with a group of young adults who live in the Greater Toronto Area. These young adults came from various Chinese churches but participate in the English congregations. The main purpose for using this particular group is because this is the current ministry context that the writer is serving in.

These young adults come from various life stages of university or college, recent grads, young careers, young marrieds and singles. This age demographic was specifically chosen as the age groups has been greatly influenced by postmodernism. As a result one needs to understand postmodernity and its impact on those who hear the Word and on preachers who are responsible for preaching the Word.

The retreat setting was utilized because it was available to the writer and did not require creating another ministry opportunity. The retreat also provided a more intimate setting and allowed for a greater intensity of teaching and preaching.

For the group these individuals resolved to attend the weekend setting on their own accord. This is of importance as it demonstrates the initiative of a group that is

willing to nurture and develop their own spiritual life instead of being forced to attend something they do not care about.

### **Small Group**

The study utilized a small group of approximately forty young adults between the ages of 19-35. The reason this age group was selected is because it is believed that this group has been heavily influenced by postmodern thinking and culture.

The study also focused on persons who have declared their commitment to Jesus Christ. Furthermore only those who are currently actively attending and participating in the local church will be considered. The purpose for these criteria is to distinguish new believers and nominal Christians from longtime and/or maturing Christians.

The hope is that given a greater length of time as a believer and through consistent church attendance the greater the exposure to various preaching themes and Christian terms and teachings. Given the length of time as a believer and the exposures to a variety of Christian themes, the writer hoped to see if these long-term believers were able to identify the central message of Jesus.

### **Understanding Research Methodology**

The group was approximately forty young adults that participated in a weekend retreat. A One group, Before-After Design Method was used for the project. Each person was assigned a random identification number. That number was used to identify the pre and post data of the same individual to allow for consistent data interpretation.

At the beginning of the retreat an online pre-test questionnaire was distributed to determine whether this group knows the central message of Jesus' preaching. The weekend consisted of preaching and teaching sessions to show and demonstrate that Jesus' central message was about the Kingdom of God and its implications to our postmodern context.

At the conclusion of the retreat an online post-test questionnaire was given to ask the group to reflect and consider the implications of understanding this central message of Jesus and how it will make a difference, if any, in the contexts they find themselves in (school, work, ministry and/or home). Not part of the thesis project is a future follow-up questionnaire that will be provided in one-year to see if the weekend preaching and teaching has caused any changes in the mindset and action in the groups' life.

### **Understanding the Research Questionnaire**

The thesis project utilized a pre and post-test questionnaire. At the beginning of the retreat each individual in the focus group was provided a random identification number by an administrator separate from the writer. This number assignment was randomized and unknown to the administrator or the writer of the survey. The sole purpose of the number was to be able to compare the data between the pre-test and post-test questionnaire.

After receiving the random identification number the individual was asked to go online to answer the questions of the pre-test survey. This was done on their own personal devices or on two separate tablets provided. The administrator of the survey

was present for general inquiries while the writer was not present in the room to allow for greater honesty from the participants.

The online survey helped to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The online survey also aided in the data and statistics analysis as all the figures were readily available. Finally the online survey helped aid in the readability of the questionnaire as handwriting can often be difficult to read.

At the conclusion of the retreat the administrator again asked participants to log in on their personal devices or the two available tablets. Using their random identification number the participants answered the questionnaire. The writer was removed from the space to again allow for greater honesty in the respondents. Upon the conclusion of the survey a simple thank-you was given and the data was not disclosed to the participants. Both the pre-test and post-test questionnaire will be provided in their entirety and placed in the appendices for reference.

#### Pre-Test Questionnaire

The questionnaire was online for ease of data collection and clarity. Two research questionnaires were used for the thesis project. The first questionnaire is the pre-test questionnaire. It was distributed at the beginning of the retreat to measure what the focus group currently recognizes and understands about the Kingdom of God.

The pre-test *questionnaire* was primarily divided into two sections. Questions one through five will appear on one page on the web-survey as displayed in the following figure.

**Figure 4.1. Question 1-5 of Pre-Test Questionnaire****Part I: Demographic**

1. What is your ID number: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:  
[ ] 19-24      [ ] 25-30      [ ] 31-40      [ ] 40+
3. Gender:  
[ ] male      [ ] female
4. I am a Christian:  
[ ] Yes      [ ] No      [ ] Unsure
5. I am a member of a church:  
[ ] Yes      [ ] No      [ ] Unsure

The first section was designed to provide a basic understanding of the demographics of the focus group. Each person was given a random identification number which was used to protect the identity and anonymity of the individual respondents. The identification number served two purposes. The first was to adequately measure the data between the pre-test and post-test and to ensure the data correlates with the same individual. The second purpose was that through the anonymity the respondents will feel more at ease to answer the questionnaire honestly without pretense or judgment for correct or incorrect answers.

The other demographic information of age was useful to examine further if age plays a factor in what a person may or may not understand. The age demographic also helped to categorize those who have grown up and been heavily influenced by the postmodern worldview. Though there is much disagreement about when the postmodern worldview began this focus group will have experienced much of the postmodern worldview over the last twenty to thirty years.

The purpose for the information of gender was to have the opportunity to identify whether or not gender played a role in understanding the message of Jesus.

The question concerning a persons' commitment to Christ was important for the project as only those who were sure they are committed believers were considered and examined. The purpose of the project was to determine what Christian believers understood about the central message of Jesus. By identifying whether or not a person was a believer was vital to the project.

The follow-up question of church membership was to help determine how involved a person is in their faith. The purpose was to identify those who understand that their faith also involves participation in the local church. Also it was important to determine that believers have exposure to Christian teaching by active participation in the church. The project was to help recognize whether churches are adequately teaching the central message of Jesus.

The second portion of the pre-test questionnaire was to invite responses from the focus group to ascertain what the current group understood about the Christian faith. Questions six through eight were displayed of the next page on the web-survey as seen in the following figure.

### **Figure 4.2. Question 6-8 of Pre-Test Questionnaire**

Part II: Please answer the following questions according to your own understanding, thoughts and beliefs:

**6. What is the central message of the Bible? (choose one)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation <input type="checkbox"/> God's Love <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Creation <input type="checkbox"/> The Great Commission <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> God's Will <input type="checkbox"/> the Kingdom of God
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**7. What is the central message of Jesus? (choose one)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation <input type="checkbox"/> Death & Resurrection <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Repentance <input type="checkbox"/> the Kingdom of God <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> God's love
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**8. What is Jesus' main teaching methodology? (choose one)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Sermons <input type="checkbox"/> Parables <input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Miracles <input type="checkbox"/> Rebuking the Religious Leaders <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lectures
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These questions provided various options that are considered, in the opinion of the writer, as some of the most popular teachings in the Christian church over the last decade. The purpose was to measure whether or not the focus group could identify the correct answer in each question. This helped determine what the group knows or does not know in order to establish a reference point to measure changes in the post-test questionnaire.

The final question appeared on the final page of the web-survey so as to not reveal the answer prematurely. The following figure displays the final question of the pre-test questionnaire.

**Figure 4.3. Question 9 of Pre-Test Questionnaire**

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9. If you are told that the central message of Jesus is The Kingdom of God, what are some of your thoughts and reflections on this?

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Question nine provided the answer to the previous question by clearly stating that that central message of Jesus is the Kingdom of God. The question was used to evaluate the surprise or shock of the respondent (if any), about what the correct answer is. There was an opportunity for the respondents to reflect or to make comments in their own words about their discovery or lack thereof.

**Post-Test Questionnaire**

The post-test questionnaire was an online survey to measure what changes may have occurred in the focus group's understanding throughout the retreat. The following figure contains the first portion of the post-test questionnaire.

**Figure 4.4. Question 1 to 5 of Post-Test Questionnaire**

Part I: Identification

1. What is your ID number: \_\_\_\_\_

Part II: Please answer the following questions according to your own understanding, thoughts and beliefs:

2. What is the central message of the Bible? (choose one)

<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation	<input type="checkbox"/> Creation	<input type="checkbox"/> God's Will
<input type="checkbox"/> God's Love	<input type="checkbox"/> The Great Commission	<input type="checkbox"/> the Kingdom of God
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		

3. What is the central message of Jesus? (choose one)

<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation	<input type="checkbox"/> Repentance	<input type="checkbox"/> God's love
<input type="checkbox"/> Death & Resurrection	<input type="checkbox"/> the Kingdom of God	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

4. What is Jesus' main teaching methodology? (choose one)

<input type="checkbox"/> Sermons	<input type="checkbox"/> Miracles	<input type="checkbox"/> Lectures
<input type="checkbox"/> Parables	<input type="checkbox"/> Rebuking the Religious Leaders	
<input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____		

5. If you did not know the central message of Jesus, why? OR. If you knew the central message of Jesus, how?

The first question was to use the identification number to continue to remind the respondents that their responses are anonymous. The second purpose was to be able to compare the post-test questionnaire with the same identification number as the pre-test questionnaire. This helped measure any changes in the respondents understanding after participating in the retreat.

Questions two to four were repeated from the pre-test questionnaire to identify whether or not the preaching has made an effective change of mind in the focus group. The questions determined whether the preaching had informed the individuals with the correct answers. Questions five was a reflection question to help the writer understand

the possible reasons why individuals can or cannot recognize the central message of Jesus. This was used primarily to see what role our churches can play in ensuring we preach and teach the same core message of Jesus.

The final series of questions were used to help the respondents recognize that identifying the central message is not simply an informational exercise. The following figure provides the remaining questions in the post-test questionnaire.

#### **Figure 4.5. Question 6 of Post-Test Questionnaire**

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6. Now that you have been through this retreat, you have now been taught/re-taught the central message of Jesus is The Kingdom of God, what difference will this make in your:

- a. Work /School Life
- b. Home/Family Life
- c. Ministry/Church Life

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Through the series of messages the preaching tried to help the hearers consider how the central message of Jesus is supposed to impact every walk of life. The goal was to ultimately pass on the correct information about the Kingdom of God but to also help lead an individual towards transformation in allowing the Kingdom paradigm to impact all spheres of life. These questions were designed to help the hearers reflect on where the messages can be applied to their daily lives. Not part of the thesis project is a future follow-up questionnaire that will be provided in one-year to see if the weekend preaching and teaching has caused any long lasting changes in the mindset and action in the groups' life.

### Variables

With any research project one needs to take into account variables that could influence the outcome. In the Christian faith tradition the greatest variable to consider is the working and prompting of the Holy Spirit. Within the lives of believers some can be long time Christ followers and while others can be young to the faith but the Holy Spirit and His revelation to people can cause varying degrees of understanding and impact. Some long time believers may not recognize certain teaching because the Spirit of God has not brought about a conviction upon that individual.

Another variable to consider is the difficulty to tangibly measure spiritual maturity. Physical maturity is easily measured and tangible, but to evaluate spiritual maturity will not be so easily evaluated. Some can believe that the length of time they have been a Christ-follower will dictate their spiritual maturity while others will recognize their daily active pursuits of God in prayer and the Word. Still others will measure their spiritual health by their acts of kindness and service. Overall it is difficult to readily gauge one's spiritual maturity.

Differing life experiences will also impact how people hear and understand the Word of God. While this group was selected for being heavily influenced by postmodernism other worldly experiences will affect how one understands and hears the Word of God. Some come from churches with strong or weak preaching ministries, others have a vibrant bible study life or an inactive community life. Even their life stages will greatly impact how one hears and understands the Word, those who are single will hear things slightly different than those who are married, and those with young children will hear things slightly different from those who are studying in post-secondary

institutions. One of the challenges of postmodernism is that words and the definitions and meanings can vary among people with differing experiences.

Finally with regards to the pre-test questionnaire itself, it was possible for an individual to arbitrarily guess the correct answer regarding the central theme of Jesus

### **Preaching Methodology**

The writer prepared sermons and utilized the “*big idea of preaching*” as the main expository preaching methodology. The concept comes from Haddon Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching*. In his book he writes, “a sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

The writer strongly agrees with this method of sermon preparation and preaching. The writer also currently employs this method in all sermon preparations. As a result the thesis project made use of this preaching method in the preparation and delivery of the sermons.

### **Preaching for the Thesis Project**

For the purpose of this project the writer prepared a sermon for each session and parable. The entire series of sermons were put together in a booklet format for the weekend retreat session. The sermon outlines will be placed in the appendix for reference. The sermons included the subject, complement, homiletical idea, an

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<sup>1</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1980), Loc. 446, Kindle.

introduction, main points and the conclusion. The writer preached these sermons without the use of a manuscript.

### **Sermon Selection Process**

The selection of the sermons was based simply on a logical and systematic progression. The first messages focused on the need to explore the Parables and the Kingdom. As a result it was necessary to provide the participants a common understanding and starting point. An overview of the Kingdom was provided and then a sermon message to help understand the parables followed suit. The following table will show the sessions and sermons and their references.

**Table 4.1 – Session/Sermon Outline**

<u>Session</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic/Parable</u>	<u>Scripture/References</u>
Fri PM- 1	80 Mins	Introduction	Mk 1:15
		Introduce Series	<i>Preaching to a Shifting Culture</i> ed. Scott Gibson
		What is the Kingdom of God?	<i>The Kingdom of God</i> Stephen Um
		What is a Parable?	Mt. 13:10-17
Sat AM– 2	40 Mins	Parable of the Sower	Mt 13:3-9; 18-23, Mk 4:3-8; 14-20, Lk 8:5-8; 11-15
Sat AM – 3	40 Mins	Parable of the Weeds	Mt 13:24-30; 36-43
Sat PM – 4	40 Mins	Parable of the Mustard and Yeast	Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19 Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21
Sat PM – 5	40 Mins	Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl	Mt 13:44; Mt 13:45-46
Sat Eve – 6	40 Mins	Parable of the Net	Mt 13:47-50
Sat Eve – 7	40 Mins	Parable of the Master’s House	Mt 13:51-52
Sun AM – 8	40 Mins	Parables of the Unmerciful Servant	Mt 18:21-35
Sun AM - 9	60 Mins	Parables of the Labourers	Mt 20:1-16

The selection of parables and sermons were based on the following criteria. The parables followed the sequence as they appear in the Gospels. The starting point was in the Gospel of Matthew. If a parable appears in more than one book, those passages were explored and referenced in the sermon as well.

As a result the second criteria for the sermon selection process was time. The writer was provided with nine sessions throughout the weekend to preach the parables. Therefore some of the parables were combined together due to their short length and similar unit of thought as presented by Jesus. Take for example the parables of the mustard seed and yeast (Matthew 13:31-33) and similarly the parables of hidden treasure and great pearl (Matthew 13:44-46), these were grouped together because of their length

and similarity. Due to the restriction of time as one walks chronologically through the parables the writer concluded on the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) but all the while references were made to the remaining parables not covered for the individuals to review on their own accord.

The final criteria for sermon selection was clarity. The following parables were selected because they explicitly stated, “the Kingdom of God/Heaven is like.” While all of Jesus’ parables point in some fashion towards the Kingdom of God as Blomberg states, “the parable form the heart of Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom.”<sup>2</sup> For the sake of simplicity and argument the writer used only the parables that explicitly described the Kingdom of God.

### **Desired Outcome**

The following were the desired outcomes of the writer at the conclusion of the thesis project. The first desired outcome was through developing an understanding of the postmodern audience the preacher would be able to convey the central message of Jesus’ teaching to the hearers and through this medium, the postmodern hearers would be able to recognize and identify that message.

The second outcome was to correct any errors. The writer wanted the participants to be able to correct any assumptions or beliefs. These can be what the individual incorrectly understood as Jesus’ central message, improper beliefs about the Kingdom of God or about the nature and purpose of parables.

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<sup>2</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), Loc: 144, Kindle.

The third desired outcome was to use the sermons to transform the participants' outlook on the world. The hope was that through the preaching of Jesus' message the hearers would re-calibrate their thinking about the Kingdom of God and as a result their lives would embrace and live out Kingdom principles.

Lastly it is the hope of the writer to use this thesis project as a valuable resource for future ministry opportunities. The sermons will become a valuable resource for future sermons to be preached in the current ministry context because a great deal of exegetical and contextual work has already been completed. The thesis project will also be a valuable to help other preachers consider preaching in the postmodern context and can be used in a workshop or bible college/seminary course should the opportunities ever arise.

## CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES AND OBSERVATIONS

### **Introduction**

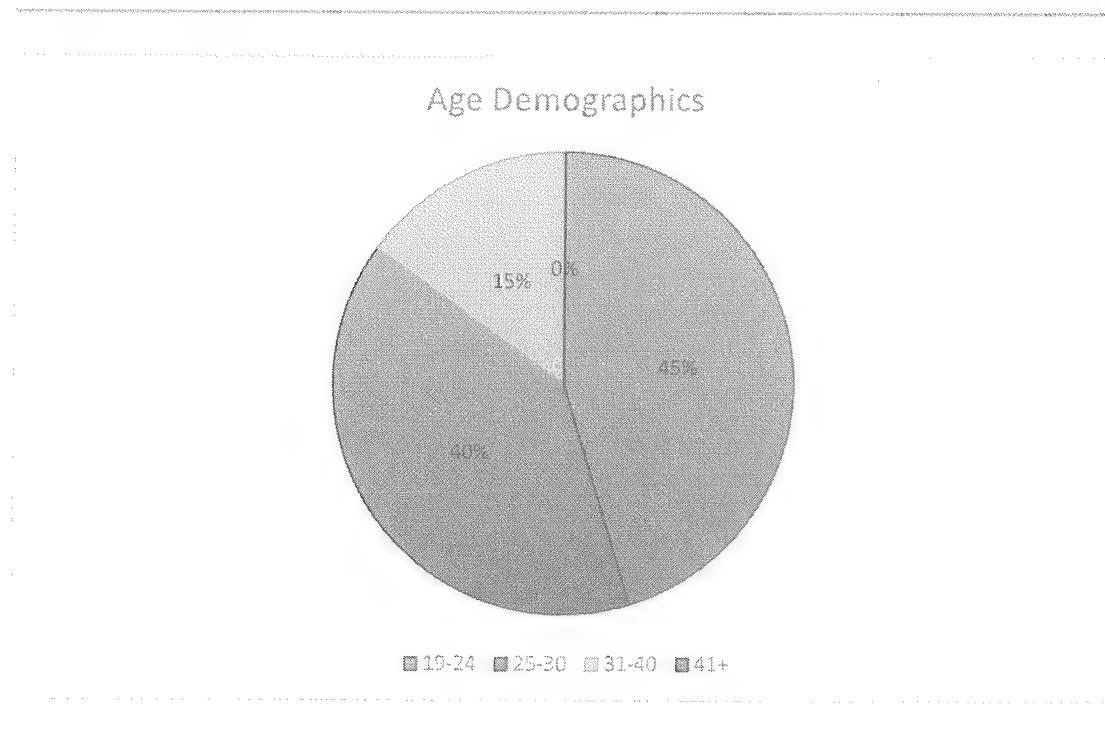
This thesis was motivated out of a belief that many Christians are unable to identify the central message of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. The thesis project set out to correct this shortcoming and to impart not only the information about the Kingdom of God but with the hope a person will undergo transformation as a result of hearing the teachings of Jesus. The following chapter will present the results of the data from the pre and post-test questionnaires. The writer will offer some interpretation to the data, some evaluation and observations concerning the research project. Finally the writer will provide some recommendations moving forward and a final conclusion to the thesis project.

### **Data Analysis Pre & Post-Test Questionnaire**

#### Demographic Information: Age

The pre-test questionnaire began with some basic demographic questions to help filter what responses will be kept and what will be discarded. Of importance to the writer was the need to keep the age range from 19-40. It is the belief of the writer that this group has grown up and been heavily influenced by the postmodern worldview. All 53 respondents met the criteria as demonstrated in the following figure.

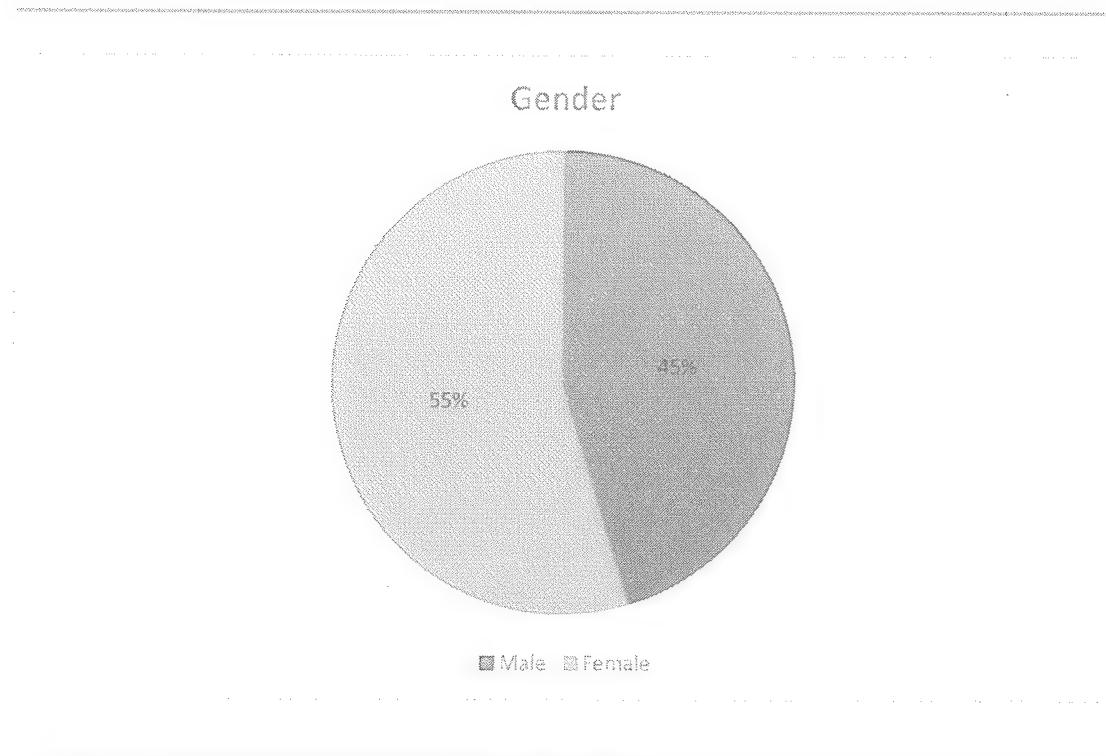
**Figure 5.1. Response to Pre-Test Questionnaire Regarding Age**



#### Demographic Question: Gender

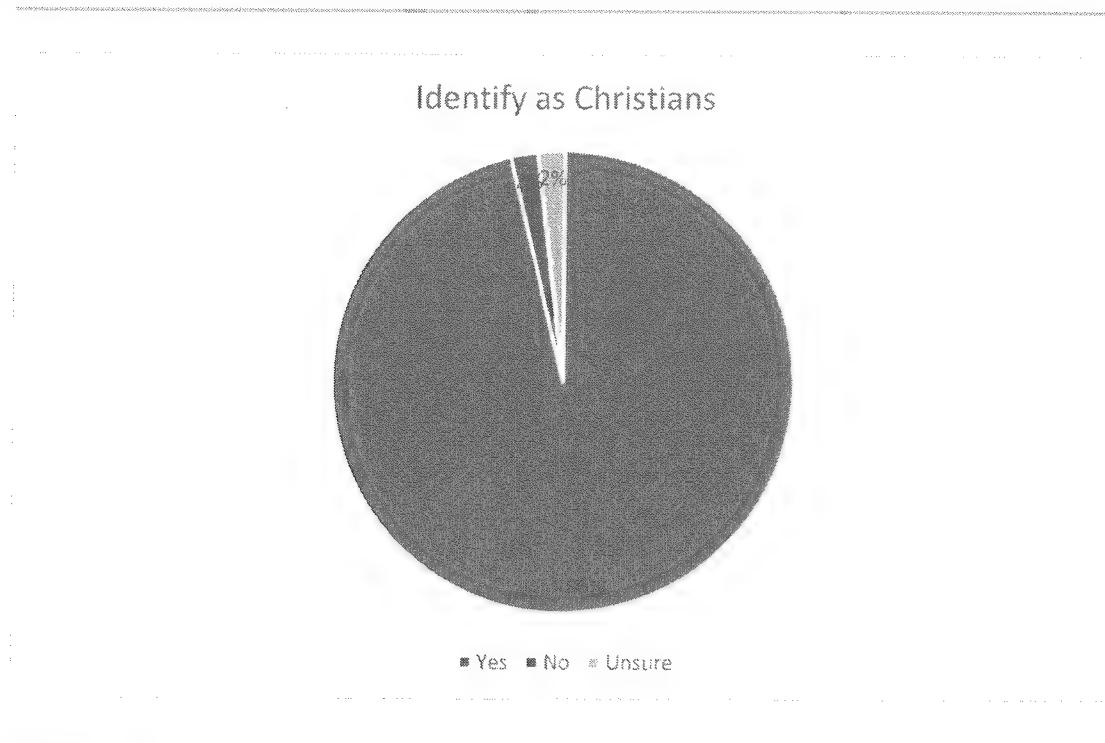
The following question in the pre-test questionnaire asked the respondents to identify their gender. The purpose of this question is to compare the data to observe whether gender would contribute to a person's understanding of the message of Jesus. A comment on this will be made in another section of this chapter. The following figure provides the gender responses.

**Figure 5.2. Response to Pre-Test Questionnaire Regarding Gender**



#### Demographic Question: Identification of Professing Christian

The next question in the pre-test questionnaire was asked to determine a person's commitment to Christ. This is important for the project as only those individuals who are sure they are committed believers will be considered and examined. The purpose of the project is to determine what Christian believers understand about the central message of Jesus. Those who cannot profess a faith in Christ will not be considered for the remainder of the project. The following figure shows that 51 of the 53 respondents identified as having a faith in Jesus Christ. As a result moving forward the survey responses will focus of the 51 respondents.

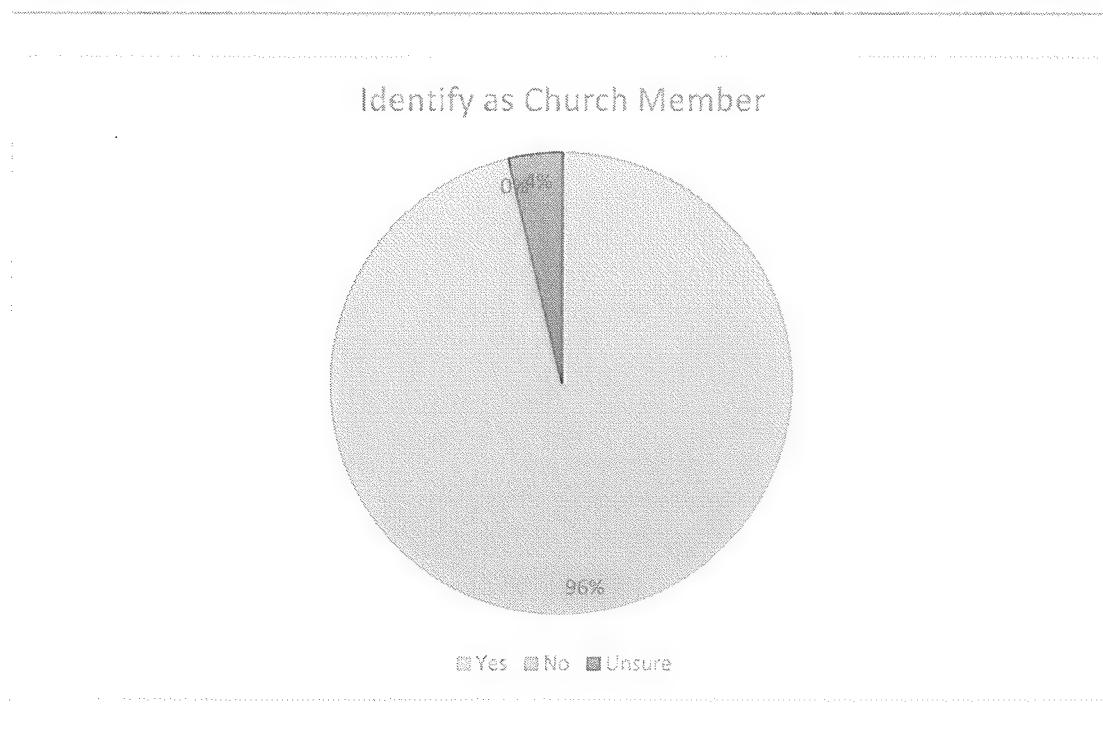
**Figure 5.3. Response to Pre-Test Questionnaire Regarding Christian Faith**

#### Demographic Question: Church Membership

The final question in the demographic portion of the pre-test questionnaire was to determine church membership. This question was used to help determine how involved a person is with their faith. It is one thing to identify as a Christian but the writer wants to determine if this individual is an active participant in the local church body, thus the question of church membership. This question was also used to establish that the Christian believer would have had exposure to Christian teaching whether through preaching or teaching as a result of being a part of the local church. Out of the 53 respondents, 51 are active members in their local church. It is important to also note that the 2 respondents that were not active members are also the same 2 respondents who

could not clearly identify themselves as believers in Christ. This was determined by seeing the follow-up response on the same survey and also by comparing the identification number. The following figure provides the information regarding the responses.

**Figure 5.4. Response to Pre-Test Questionnaire Regarding Church Membership**



### Pre & Post-Test Questionnaire Responses

#### Central Message of the Bible

The following questions in the pre-test questionnaire was to help the writer determine what the current group understands about the Christian faith. The questions were used to measure whether or not the group can identify the correct answers for each

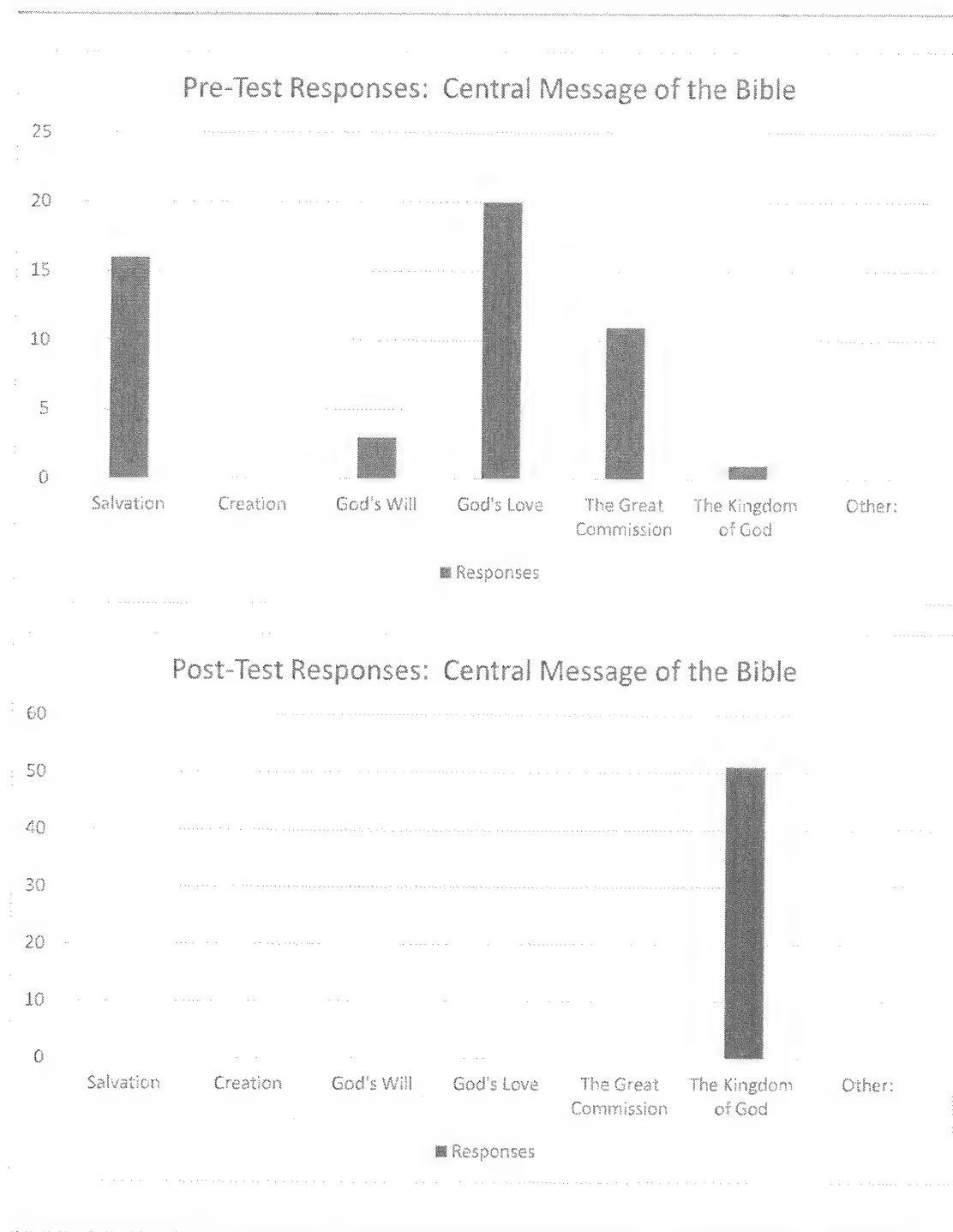
question. This will help determine a base line for what the group knows or does not know in order to set a reference point to measure changes in the post-test questionnaire.

The questions gave the respondents various teachings that the writer considers the most popular in the church over the last decade. The writer is more concerned with the responses of question 7, "what is the central message of Jesus," and question 8, "what is Jesus' main teaching methodology?" It is also important to remember that at this point only 51 of the 53 questionnaires were considered.

In looking at the pre and post-test questionnaires, the writer wanted to see if there was any indication if gender would play a significant role in whether or not the respondents could identify the correct answers, as stated in the previous section regarding gender. In looking through the data the writer has observed that there is no identifiable patterns in the answers provided between genders. No gender biases could be seen in any of the responses.

The subsequent charts will show the responses to both the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. This will illustrate the changes that the retreat made in the individuals understanding. The following figures provides the responses to the question regarding the central message of the Bible.

**Figure 5.5. Responses to Pre & Post-Test Questionnaire: Central Message of the Bible**



In the pre-test questionnaire, the writer recognizes that people will have differing points of view regarding the Bible's central message. For this thesis, the writer comes with the perspective that the Kingdom of God is an overarching theme throughout all of the scriptures. While there are many possible answers depending on a person's point of view regarding the whole of the Bible but in the opinion of the writer these themes are all prevalent throughout the entirety of scriptures.

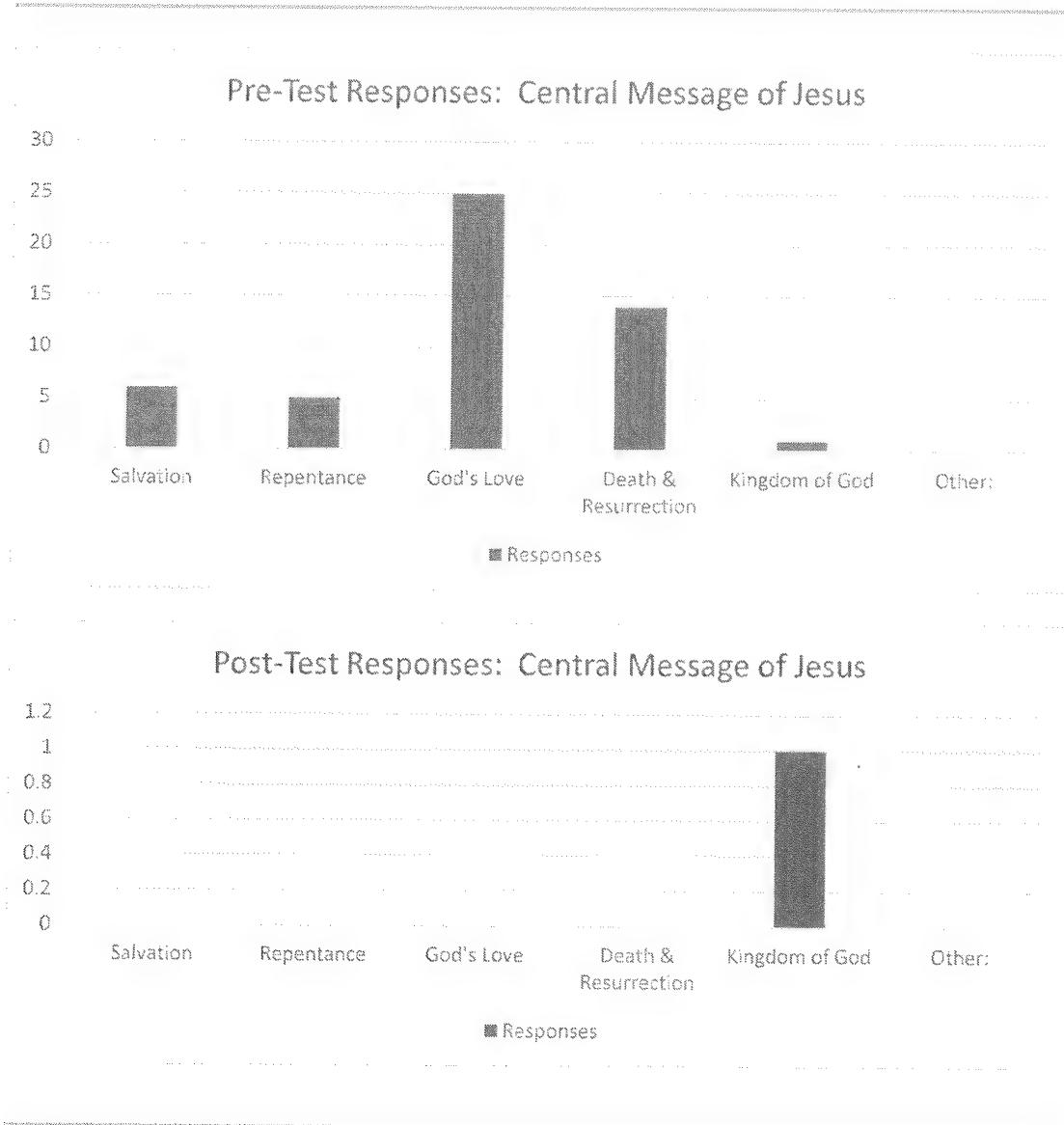
What is of importance to the writer is that only one person believed that the theme of the Kingdom of God was the central message of the Bible. Nearly all the respondents did not even consider the Kingdom of God as an important theme when compared to Salvation or God's love as demonstrated in the chart. Is it possible that this point-of-view skews how Christians proclaim the message of the Bible? Is the importance of God's love and salvation the only themes that are shared, discussed and presented both in the church and to nonbelievers? If that is so, it is no wonder many find it difficult to see the Kingdom of God as a theme in the Bible or even the central message of Jesus.

In the post-test questionnaire all the respondents indicated that the central message of the Bible was about the Kingdom of God. Through the preaching portions of the retreat people came to an understanding that the theme of the Kingdom of God is seen throughout the Bible. One area of concern is whether or not the respondents really agreed with this premise or were the respondents simply answering the question attempting to give the "correct" answer for the questionnaire. Perhaps it will be worthwhile in a future post-test questionnaire to ask people to identify the central message of the Bible and a follow-up question as to how much they agree or disagree using a 5-point scale.

### Central Message of Jesus

The next question is to gauge whether the respondents can recognize the central message of Jesus. This question is the key to this thesis project. The following figure presents the responses to the question about the central message of Jesus.

**Figure 5.6. Response to Pre & Post-Test Questionnaire: Central Message of Jesus**



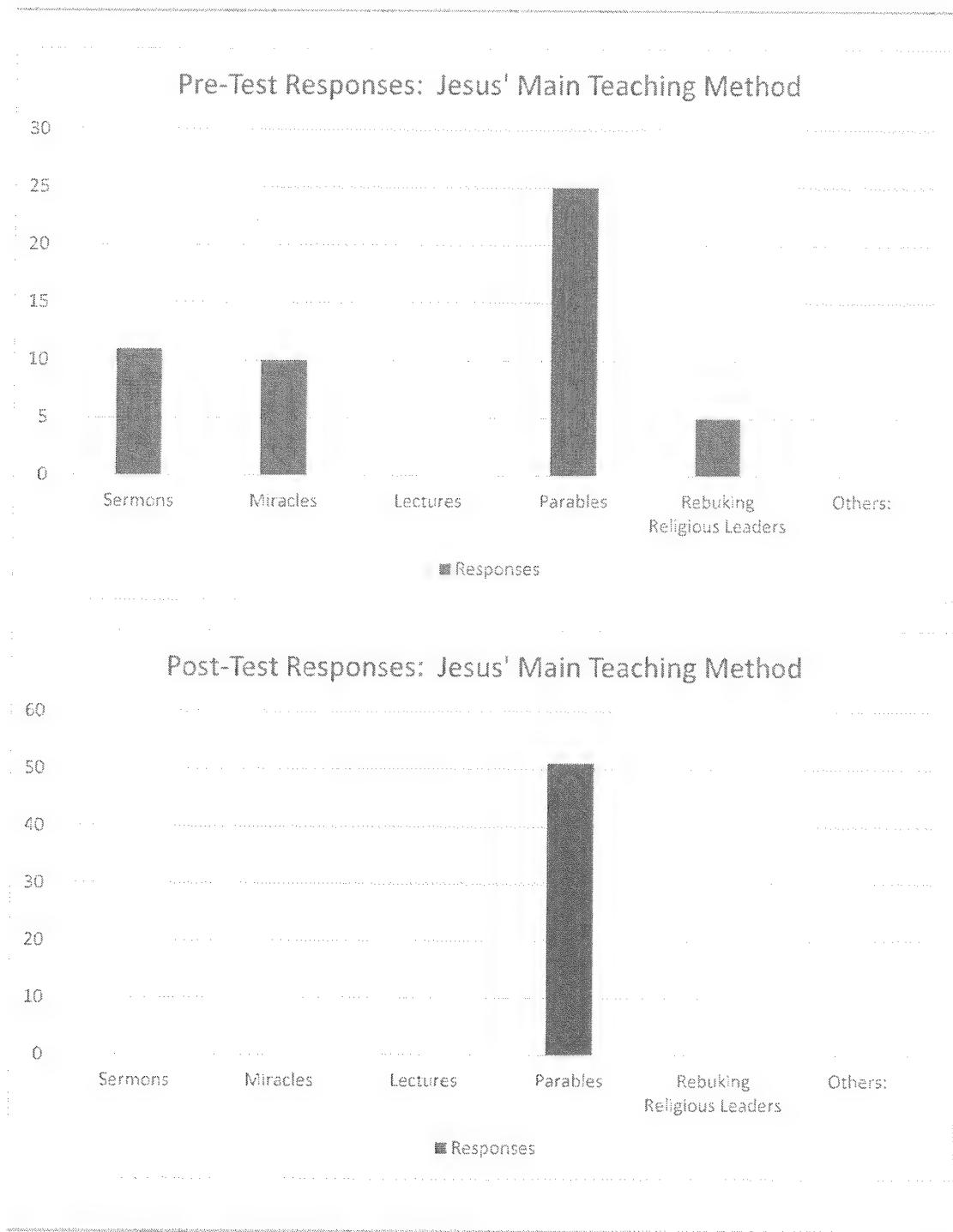
The pre-test responses to this particular question proved to support the initial thoughts and assumptions of the writer. Out of the 51 respondents only 1 person could clearly identify that the central message of Jesus is the Kingdom of God. So it comes as no surprise that many Christians cannot identify the central message of Jesus. While it is not a surprise it is also a source of sadness that many who profess Jesus as Lord and Savior cannot identify what their Lord and Savior preached and taught.

The post-test responses demonstrated that the preaching in the retreat setting was able to help the focus group correctly identify Jesus' central message about the Kingdom. The 51 respondents were able to indicate the Kingdom of God as the central message of Jesus. This accomplished one of the goals of the writer, to help Christians identify the main message of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. Much like in the previous question it would be worthwhile to explore if the respondents truly agree with this notion of Jesus' central message by including a follow-up post-test question of how much the individual agrees by using a 5-point scale.

#### Jesus' Main Teaching Method

The ensuing question asked if the individuals could identify Jesus' main teaching methodology. The following figure provides the responses.

**Figure 5.7. Response to Pre & Post-Test Questionnaire: Jesus' Main Teaching Method**



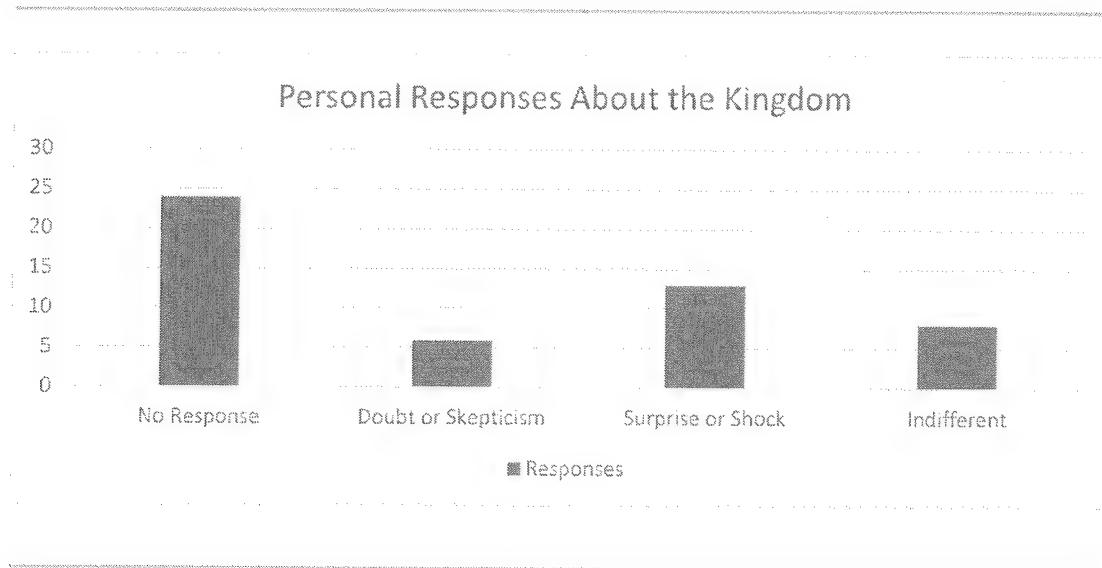
In the pre-test responses the majority of people identified Jesus's parables as his main teaching methodology. It is interesting to note that almost half of the respondents could identify Jesus' use of parables but in comparison to the previous question, the respondents did not recognize that the central message of those parables was about the Kingdom of God. Through the retreat, the post-test questionnaire indicated that the respondents can now identify Jesus' main teach method through the parables. This accomplished another goal of the writer that Christians would be able to recognize that Jesus taught through the use of parables.

### **Personal Responses in Pre and Post-Test Questionnaire**

#### **Responses: Discovery About the Kingdom of God**

Question nine in the pre-test questionnaire provides the answer by clearly stating the central message of Jesus as the Kingdom of God. The question is used to evaluate the personal reactions of the respondents regarding this discovery. The subsequent figure provides the responses that were given.

**Figure 5.8. Responses to Question 9 in Pre-Test Questionnaire**



The responses to the questions were the personal opinions of the respondents.

The writer took the responses and interpreted the answers and categorized them into the various groupings with the exception of the “no response” category.

From the data one can see that almost half of the respondents did not answer this question. This was unfortunate and in future the writer would edit the survey to with a multiple choice question in order to demand an actual response. Of those who did respond some were surprised or shocked by this discovery, which the writer believes would have been the most common response to this discovery.

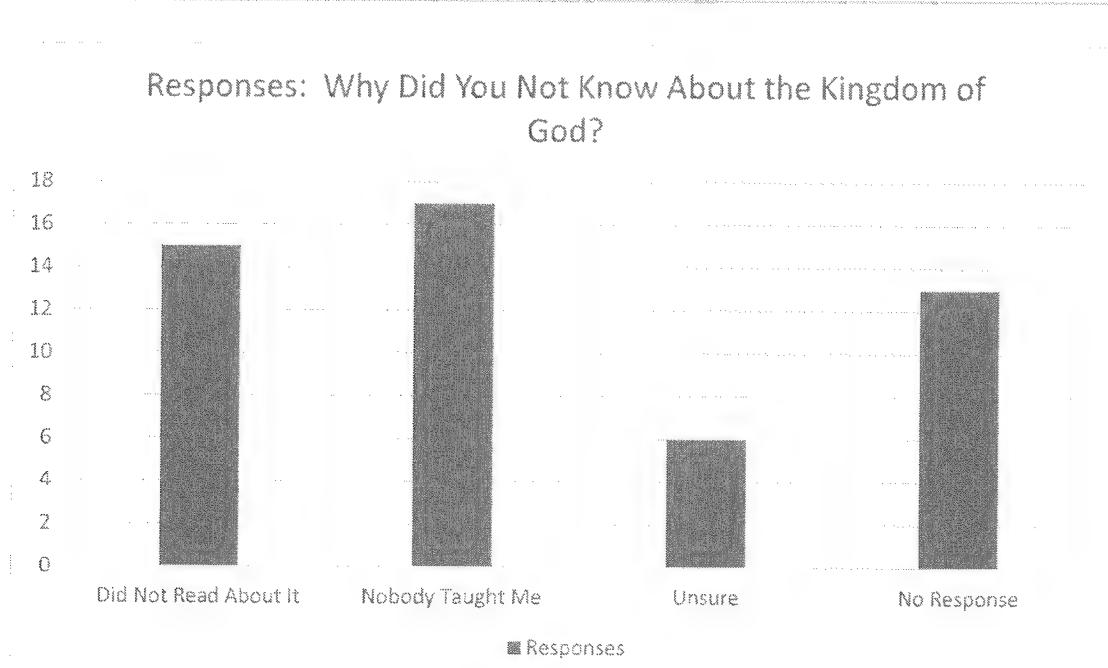
The writer was surprised that others doubted whether or not the central message of Jesus was indeed the Kingdom of God. All of those who were skeptical of the answer also indicated that parables were the main teaching method of Jesus. If one can recognize Jesus’ use of parables and yet when scripture states bluntly, “the Kingdom of God is like...” the writer is surprised that people would be doubtful about the Jesus’ core message.

Finally some were simply indifferent to the discovery. This was a cause of concern simply because in the opinion of the writer indifference to the word of God or the discovery of God's truth would never be an appropriate response. The writer believes and hopes for a conviction from the Spirit of God to cause people to yearn to worship or praise God for His revelation.

*Responses: Reasons Why We Do Not Know the Central Message of the Kingdom of God*

Question five in the post-test questionnaire is an important question for the writer. This question was designed to identify any reasons and patterns why individuals can or cannot recognize the central message of Jesus. The writer hopes to see what role the church plays in this teaching and what responsibility lies with the individuals. The following figure presents the data from the post-test questionnaire.

**Figure 5.9. Responses to Post-Test Question 5: Why Did You Not Know About the Kingdom of God?**



The responses to the questions were the personal opinions of the respondents.

The writer took the responses and interpreted the answers and categorized them into the various groupings with the exception of the “no response” category.

Again, the writer was disappointed that nearly one third of the respondents chose not to answer this question. As a result in future this question in the post-test questionnaire should be altered to a required multiple choice question. It is also noteworthy to see that 6 people were unsure why they did not know the central message of Jesus. It is difficult ascertain what this means.

The responses were nearly equal that some respondents did not know the central message of Jesus due to the limitation of their own personal study. While some respondents placed the emphasis on the teaching of the Kingdom with others such as the church. It is also noteworthy that there was no recognizable pattern with age or gender in the data. The writer was surprised that the responses were nearly equal as the assumption of the writer was that many would place the responsibility of blame with the church or others instead of the personal responsibility of the individual.

### **Reflections on the Research Process**

Overall the writer believes that the research portion of this project went quite smoothly. Both questionnaires were supplied and answered without incident. Using the online survey allowed for clear responses without having to decipher the illegible handwriting of respondents. The use of the random identification number was helpful in being able to compare the data in the pre and post-test questionnaire.

There were some adjustments that can be made to the pre and post-test questionnaire to ensure an accurate response. When allowing individuals to write their own personal comments or reflections the writer found that many chose to leave these questions unanswered. This was particularly evident in question 9 of the pre-test questionnaire and questions 5 and 6 of the post-test questionnaire. Using a multiple choice question would have helped ensure a response to the question.

Another change to the process would be to reduce the amount of messages of the retreat. It was very ambitious to have 9 messages in a span of 3 days. While this was the proposal of the retreat committee, the writer would have found it more beneficial to scale back to 4-5 messages. There was a lot of information given during that time but the writer was also concerned whether or not there was an information overload. Overall, the retreat did ensure that those in attendance could now correctly identify the Kingdom of God as Jesus' central message and the parables as his main teaching methodology.

### **Proposal for Further Research**

The final question of the post-test questionnaire was used to challenge the respondents to a life transformation after hearing the messages. The questions were used to invite the hearers to consider how the Kingdom of God can impact every area of an individual's life. The respondents were given the opportunity to record their thoughts and were also encouraged to write them down on a piece of paper for their own personal reference. In future the respondents of the survey will be invited to answer the post-test questionnaire in one year to see if there has been any change in the person's understanding and their personal goals in post-test question six. This portion of the

questionnaire is used as a time capsule to see how individual's believe the Kingdom can impact every facet of their life and to measure any difference that may have occurred one year later.

For further research the writer would like to expand the survey to have a cross-section of ages and life stages to see if age and life experience will be a factor in whether or not people can recognize Jesus' central message. It would be worthwhile for the writer to extend the invitation of the questionnaires to the members of the local church where the writer serves. This will help gauge what the writers own congregation knows or does not know about the Kingdom of God.

### **Observations and Recommendations**

The main observations from the data is that the responses supported the hypothesis of the writer that the majority of Christians are unable to identify the central message of Jesus. Through the various preaching sessions the writer was able to correct this shortcoming. Though this focus group was a small sample size the writer would like expand this project to fit the local ministry context in order to evaluate how well the local congregation understands the central message of Jesus.

The writer has the opportunity to preach a series of sermons in the local church context week to week. As a result many of the sermons about the parables and the Kingdom of God have already been prepared and can be preached to the local congregation to ensure that members of the church will be able to identify the Kingdom of God as the central message of Jesus' teaching. The writer has enough material to preach for one year on the parables and the Kingdom of God.

Another recommendation is to adapt this material to suit the context of pastoral preaching training. This can come in the form of an adjunct seminary faculty member to teach a class on preaching parables in the postmodern context. This course would help preachers develop their preaching skills and to recognize the importance of the central message of Jesus. It would also benefit preachers to understand the postmodern context and to see how Jesus' methodology of using parables is very relevant and useful today. If there is not an opportunity for teaching in a seminary, the writer can offer a simple weekend course for preachers to also be equipped and to utilize the same teaching material in a more condensed format.

### **Conclusion**

As stated earlier this thesis project was motivated out of a belief that many Christians could not identify the central message of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. This shortcoming is a concern for the writer because many of Christ-followers are not fully aware of what Christ actually taught and the means by which he taught.

Throughout the weekend retreat the writer was able to help rectify the shortcoming of recognizing Jesus' central message. This can be seen in the data collected from the post-test questionnaire. It is also noteworthy that throughout the weekend there were many informal interactions with the individuals and this provided a verbal means to evaluate their responses as well as the clarity of communicating the content. The sermons challenged the participants to reflect critically on their own spiritual engagement, use of the Bible in their own study and participation in the local church and being sent into the world.

The material on the Kingdom of God proved to be surprising to many of the participants. This can be attributed to both a lack of teaching in the church as well as a lack of understanding from individual Bible reading and study. The information about the Kingdom theme as found in the whole of scriptures and more so evident in the teaching of Jesus, was well received and understood. The focus group responded with enthusiasm when they recognized the Kingdom theme emerging from the whole of Scriptures.

There were also some deficiencies in the presentation of the material during the retreat. The schedule was intensive with nine message in the span of three days. This was very physically and emotionally taxing on everyone involved. The second deficiency was the intensive timeframe caused the writer to be very selective with the material. On one occasion the writer was forced to combine two parables into one sermon. The nine messages were only a snapshot of numerous parables of the Kingdom that Jesus spoke.

One area that was beneficial was the group discussions that occurred immediately after the messages. Each sermon was followed with some discussion questions for the groups to reflect and reiterate what was understood in each message. It was in the discussions and sharing that the participants were able to articulate their thoughts and demonstrated that the material was being internalized.

The revelation of God's Kingdom and the working of the Holy Spirit have allowed the writer to share with the people of God about God's Kingdom. It was the combination of the preaching, the motivation of the believers to learn and grow and the work of the Spirit that helped these disciples to recognize the magnificence of the central

message of Jesus, “the Kingdom of God is near.” The sharing of this wonderful truth about the Kingdom with more believers continues to compel the writer to use this project in other ministry opportunities.

## APPENDIX A

### Pre-Test: Research Questionnaire

#### Part I: Demographic

1. What is your ID number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age:  
[ ] 19-24      [ ] 25-30      [ ] 31-40      [ ] 41+

3. Gender:  
[ ] male      [ ] female

4. I am a Christian:  
[ ] Yes      [ ] No      [ ] Unsure

5. I am a member of a church:

[ ] Yes      [ ] No      [ ] Unsure

**Part II: Please answer the following questions according to your own understanding, thoughts and beliefs:**

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6. What is the central message of the Bible? (choose one)

Salvation     Creation     God's Will     God's Love  
 The Great Commission     the Kingdom of God  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is the central message of Jesus? (choose one)

Salvation     Repentance     God's love  
 Death & Resurrection     the Kingdom of God  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is Jesus' main teaching methodology? (choose one)

Sermons     Miracles     Lectures  
 Parables     Rebuking the Religious Leaders  
 Others: \_\_\_\_\_

9. If you are told that the central message of Jesus is The Kingdom of God, what are some of your thoughts and reflections on this?

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### Post-Test: Research Questionnaire

**Part I: Identification**

1. What is your ID number \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: Please answer the following questions according to your own understanding, thoughts and beliefs:**

2. What is the central message of the Bible? (choose one)

Salvation     Creation     God's Will     God's Love  
 The Great Commission     the Kingdom of God  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the central message of Jesus? (choose one)

Salvation     Repentance     God's love  
 Death & Resurrection     the Kingdom of God  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is Jesus' main teaching methodology? (choose one)

Sermons     Miracles     Lectures  
 Parables     Rebuking the Religious Leaders  
 Others: \_\_\_\_\_

5. If you did not know the central message of Jesus, why? OR. If you knew the central message of Jesus, how?

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6. Now that you have been through this retreat, you have now been taught/re-taught the central message of Jesus is The Kingdom of God, what difference will this make in your:

a. Work /School Life

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b. Home/Family Life

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c. Ministry/Church Life

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## APPENDIX B

**Retreat Speaking - Sessions/Sermon Outline**

<u>Session</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic/Parable</u>	<u>Scripture/References</u>
Fri PM- 1	80 Mins	Introduction	Mk 1:15
		Introduce Series	<i>Preaching to a Shifting Culture</i> ed. Scott Gibson
		What is the Kingdom of God?	<i>The Kingdom of God</i> Stephen Um
		What is a Parable?	Mt. 13:10-17
Sat AM- 2	40 Mins	Parable of the Sower	Mt 13:3-9; 18-23, Mk 4:3-8; 14-20, Lk 8:5-8; 11-15
Sat AM – 3	40 Mins	Parable of the Weeds	Mt 13:24-30; 36-43
Sat PM – 4	40 Mins	Parable of the Mustard and Yeast	Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19 Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21
Sat PM – 5	40 Mins	Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl	Mt 13:44; Mt 13:45-46
Sat Eve – 6	40 Mins	Parable of the Net	Mt 13:47-50
Sat Eve – 7	40 Mins	Parable of the Master's House	Mt 13:51-52
Sun AM – 8	40 Mins	Parables of the Unmerciful Servant	Mt 18:21-35
Sun AM - 9	60 Mins	Parables of the Laborers	Mt 20:1-16

## APPENDIX C

### Series Introduction

#### **Introduction to Series**

I want to begin with a very serious and challenging question, what was the central message of Jesus?

Your answers may vary and as a result those various answers will have implications on how you live your life and how you live out your faith.

The answer may surprise you but do not worry a majority of people do not know the answer.

Allow me to share with you an excerpt written by Vic Gordon from the book, *Preaching to a Shifting Culture* (pg 44-45).

*Jesus was not only a preacher; but he was a preacher of the gospel. Even more, Jesus was the original proclaimers of the Christian gospel. Evangelicals derive their appellation from the Greek word for gospel (*euangelion*), which stands out in the New Testament as the most important doctrine and the central core of the faith. The gospel is the controlling content of the Christian movement, and, not surprisingly, Jesus was its first proclaimers. Jesus Christ the Preacher stands at the beginning of twenty centuries of proclaiming the gospel. Those of us who sense this as our life calling would do well to pay close attention to this original Preacher of the gospel, the pioneer of our task.*

*So Jesus spent three years proclaiming good news in and around Israel. What was the content of his gospel? ... Jesus proclaimed good news about the kingdom of God. There is a consensus among New Testament scholars that the main theme in the preaching (and teaching) of Jesus was the kingdom of God. Most Christians I run into do not know this! ... A good number of those who did not know were pastors... Christians call Jesus their Master Teacher. They are right (John 13:13), but they do not know what he taught!*

What is the writer getting at? Many people do not know that the central message of Jesus' preaching and teaching was about the Kingdom of God. The central message of the gospel is about the Kingdom of God. This has deep implications upon the ministries of our churches and the ministry of preaching.

As preachers, do we follow in the tradition of Jesus in proclaiming the same central truth of the Kingdom of God? Or, do we end up preaching a completely different gospel or even an incomplete gospel? For our church ministries, if preaching is one of our main sources of teaching and direction, have we guided our churches in the wrong direction because we do not keep the central message of Jesus – central?

Let me illustrate it in this fashion. If we believe that the central message of Jesus is to baptize people, the result is that we preach only about baptism and all our ministries are focused on getting people baptized. If we believe the central message of Jesus was to teach children about salvation. We preach messages from this vantage point and all our ministries likewise will follow suit.

Now why do many Christians not know the central message of Jesus was about the Kingdom of God? Do people in our churches know? As preachers are we aware? What implications will this have on our ministries from the pulpit, to worship, to outreach, to stewardship, to nurturing and to caring? Have we missed the mark on teaching about the Kingdom and allowing all our ministries to fall under that same umbrella? According to Gordon, we have. That is the purpose for why we will be looking at this series.

## The Parables of Jesus

### Understanding the Kingdom of God through the Parables of Jesus

Introduction to the Parables of Jesus about the Kingdom of God

During Jesus' earthly ministry, he went about preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God. Jesus frequently used parables as a means to present this message.

#### Definition of a Parable

The word "Parable" is a transliteration of the Greek "PARABOLE" (para-bow-lay). It comes from two Greek words, "para" (translated "beside") and "ballo" (translated "to throw"). Literally, the word parable means "to throw beside" or "to cast alongside"<sup>1</sup>. The general idea of a parable is to place one thing beside another for the purpose of comparison. Often times Jesus will use the term "like" in His parables as a means of comparison. Parables are stories or narratives drawn from nature or from every day human experiences.

#### Purpose of a Parable

Why did Jesus decide to speak in Parables? The answer is clearly given in Matthew 13:10-17.

##### To Conceal

Jesus spoke in parables to conceal "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven" from the crowds. Jesus was willing to teach those who wanted to follow Him and at the same time He would prevent others from understanding what was being said. Not everyone in the crowds that followed Jesus were truly willing to follow Jesus. Some were curious, others were skeptical, some were prejudiced, some were hardened and others hated Him. Parables were used to conceal the truth of the Kingdom from these types of people. Those who were not interested in obeying the teachings of Jesus would hear the parables and fail to grasp its meaning, "but whoever does not have (an honest and receptive heart), even what he has will be taken away from him (by failing to understand and being sent away)" – Matthew 13:12b.

##### To Reveal

Jesus also used parables to reveal "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven". Those who genuinely sought the truth and were willing to obey often asked Jesus for an explanation of the parables. Jesus would then give them the meaning of the parable privately see Mark 4:33-34. Jesus would take the "known" (earthly truth) and compare it to the "unknown" (heavenly truth) so that the disciples would know the truth.

<sup>1</sup> Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary – entry for Parable

### Subject of the Parables

For the purposes of this study we will be looking closely at the Parables that speak directly about the Kingdom of God. Many of these parables will begin with the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven is like...”

Many of these parables will address the kingdom of God under the following themes.

1. Character of the Kingdom
2. Character of the King
3. Character of the Kingdom Person

### Guidelines to Remember about Parables

As we study the Parables of Jesus it is important to follow some simple guidelines to ensure good interpretation.

1. Avoid the extreme of looking for some spiritual truth in every fine detail of the parable.
2. Avoid the extreme of saying there is only ONE spiritual truth in each parable.
3. Context is important:
  - a. Who was Jesus speaking to? Who was the intended audience?
  - b. What was Jesus trying to accomplish with this parable?
  - c. What is the lesson to be learned?
4. Allow Jesus to interpret the parables for you. If Jesus gives an interpretation, follow it closely.

For the purposes of this study we will attempt to look at the Parables of Jesus that deal with the Kingdom of God in chronological order as they are found in the Gospels, starting in Matthew.

## **Kingdom of God**

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### **Kingdom of God vs. Kingdom of Heaven**

What exactly is the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven? The Gospels give us some insight that these two terms are in fact one and the same. Compare the following passages Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20; Matthew 13:31 and Mark 4:30-31.

We find that Matthew uses the expression the “Kingdom of Heaven” while the other writers used the term “Kingdom of God”. Many speculate that since Matthew is writing to a predominantly Jewish audience he chose the term “kingdom of heaven” because Jews were reluctant to use the name of God (out of reverence and the 3rd commandment). Another possible reason is that Matthew’s Jewish audiences were anticipating a coming physical kingdom and the expression “heaven” would emphasize a spiritual kingdom as well.

Therefore the terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are one and the same.

### **What is the Kingdom of God?**

The kingdom of God involves a few concepts.

#### **The Reign of God**

For the Jews the term “kingdom” often carried with it the notion of “reigning” or a dominion. Therefore the “kingdom of heaven” is wherever the reign or dominion of God is manifested.

#### **Spiritual Nature**

We are told in the Bible that the kingdom of God would not be found in the form of a physical kingdom see John 18:46. The Kingdom would also manifest itself in spiritual ways see Romans 14:17.

#### **Church**

How would you define the church today? Obviously we realize that the church is more than just a building, it is the community of believers whose hearts have surrendered to the sovereignty of God. It is possible then to surmise that the “church” and “kingdom” are interrelated, but not, the same.

#### **Both Now and Not Yet**

The kingdom of God has both a present and a future element. You will often hear that the Kingdom of God is here and now and yet other parables we will see the Kingdom is still to come. The Kingdom of God has begun, is active and will be fully consummated when Christ comes again.

#### **Now**

By virtue of Jesus’ authority and rule the kingdom has already been inaugurated. We see from various scripture references that Jesus Christ has

been given authority and all things have been placed under his rule. Previously stated we see that the church also contains elements of the kingdom and as such the church exists now and subsequently the kingdom exists now. The spiritual kingdom is present as the rule of God is upon the hearts of believers today.

#### Not Yet

Jesus also spoke about the kingdom in future terms about the culmination of the kingdom when Christ returns. Scripture also provides insights to a coming judgment that will be inherited by those who follow and obey the will of the Father.

Lastly this guide will refer back to the scriptures and in the majority of cases the quotations and references from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Let us begin our journey of exploring the Parables of Jesus that teach us about the Kingdom of God.

## Sermon Outlines

### **The Parable of the Sower**

Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23

Mark 4:3-8; 14-20

Luke 8:5-8; 11-15

**Subject:**

How is the Kingdom of God made known?

**Complement:**

The Kingdom of God is made known through understanding the Word that God provides.

**Homiletical Idea:**

A teachable heart is where God's truth can take root and will produce good fruit.

### Introduction

We will begin a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we will be looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven).

Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven (God), however he did not always find a receptive audience. As we look at the context of this parable we see that just before in Matthew 11, Jesus performs miracles but the people did not repent. In Matthew 12 we see a crowd forming to follow Jesus in order to plot against Him. It is for this reason Jesus begins to speak in parables (see Matthew 13).

Jesus was confronting the problem that many people had ears to hear His message yet their ears had become deaf and they could not understand because their hearts were hard. It is in this context Jesus uses the Parable of the Sower to further illustrates this message. Through this parable Jesus illustrates the different reactions to the hearing the message of the Kingdom. We should hear that a teachable heart is where God's truth can take root and produce good fruit.

This is one of the few parables that Jesus provides an interpretation for us. This parable can also be found in Mark 4:3-9; 14-20 and Luke 8:5-8, 11-15.

#### 1. Explanation of the Parable

##### a. The Sower

- i. The identity of the sower is not mentioned in this parable specifically.
- ii. Drawing from the context of Matthew 13:37 – the Parable of the Weeds, it is possible to assume that the sower is Jesus

##### b. The seed

- i. Jesus tells us that the seed is the “word of the kingdom” cf. Matthew 13:19a

It is here that we are reminded that a teachable heart is where God’s truth of the Kingdom can take root and produce good fruit.

c. The types of Soil

- i. Path – represent the one who hears and does not understand
  - 1. Their hearts are hardened before hearing the Word
  - 2. The birds represent the evil one (the devil) who snatches away the Word from those whose ears are hardened
- ii. Rocky Places - represent those who hear the word and receive it with joy.
  - 1. This only endures for a short time as no root had taken place
  - 2. So when trouble or persecution comes this person falls away quickly
- iii. Among Thorns – represent those who heard but do not bear any fruit because it is choked by
  - 1. Cares of this world
  - 2. Deceit of wealth
  - 3. Pleasures of life (Lk 8)
- iv. The good soil – represents the one who hears the word and understands it and bears fruit and produces
  - 1. Luke 8:15 – hold fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience
  - 2. What is the correlation of “understanding” and “bearing fruit”?
  - 3. What kind of fruit?
    - a. Fruit of the spirit
    - b. Fruit of growing in holiness
    - c. Fruit of good works
    - d. Fruit of thanksgiving, giving

2. Application of the Parable

- a. If you are like the “path”
  - i. You have heard about Jesus and continue to reject Him
  - ii. You will not bear any fruit
- b. If you are like the “rocky place”
  - i. You accepted Jesus but you are not firmly grounded in the faith – when tough times come you may walk away
  - ii. You will not bear any fruit
- c. If you are like the “thorns”

- i. You know Jesus but you are preoccupied with many other things of the world,
- ii. You will not bear much fruit
- d. If you are like the “good soil”
  - i. You will bear much fruit

#### Conclusion

When Jesus finished his parable he declared, “he who has ears, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9). Jesus knows that not all those who have ears will really listen and hear. Have you heard today? Are you like the good soil?

A teachable heart is where God’s truth of the Kingdom can take root and produce good fruit.

**The Parable of the Weeds**

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

**Subject:**

What principle does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the Kingdom of Heaven?

**Complement:**

Jesus will address the issue of evil at the end of the age.

**HI:**

The issue of evil will be dealt with at the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Introduction**

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Last time we look at the Parable of the Sower and we learned that people respond to the Word of the Kingdom in different ways. As we look at the Parable of the Weeds we see that Jesus wants His disciples to know that the issues of evil will be addressed. This is another parable that Jesus provides for us an explanation.

**1. Explanation of the Parable**

- a. The sower – is the Son of Man – Jesus – V37
- b. The field – is the world – V38
  - i. The world is the location where the Son of Man came to sow the seeds
  - ii. This is how the Son of Man begins to exercise his authority
- b. The good seed – sons of the kingdom – V38
  - i. Those submit to Jesus as Lord and King and observe all that He commands
- c. The weeds – sons of the evil one – V38
  - i. They are within the realm of the king – they will be gathered later and thrown out
  - ii. They do not submit to the king
- d. The enemy – is the devil – V39
  - i. Satan tried to tempt Christ and failed
  - ii. He now tries to destroy the efforts of the King
- e. The harvest – end of the age – V39
  - i. Great harvest and glorious coming and appearance of the king
- f. The reapers – angels – V41
  - i. Angels will accompany Christ, they will separate the wicked from the just

Jesus tells us that the issue of evil will be dealt with at the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. Jesus main point of the parable

- a. V40 – the problem of the weeds will not be fully addressed until the harvest
  - i. This is done for the wellbeing of the good seed
- b. V41 – at the end of the age – the son of man will bring a final resolution to this problem
  - i. His angels will gather the offenders and lawless ones
- c. V42 – they are gathered out of the kingdom – dealt with fairly
  - i. Furnace of fire, wailing and gnashing of teeth
- d. V43 – blessing of the righteous

Jesus tells us that the issue of evil will be dealt with at the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. Application

- 1. Christ is patient and longsuffering so you can grow
  - a. The reason the wicked were allowed to remain was out of concern of the wheat to grow
- 2. Kingdom is both present and future
  - a. V41 – will gather out of his kingdom – the kingdom is in existence before the end of the age
  - b. V43 – shine in the kingdom – after the harvest the righteous will continue in a kingdom without the weeds
- 3. All are in the kingdom now – but not in the future
  - a. The good seed are in the kingdom now – are called to grow
  - b. Those who offend are in the kingdom now – cause others to stumble
  - c. Place of punishment is the reward of the wicked

**Conclusion**

Jesus tells us that the issue of evil will be dealt with at the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples are warned not allow themselves to be influenced by the wicked ones.

The parable also helps us answer one of life's most difficult questions – why is there evil in the world? The promise is that Jesus will deal justly with evil. We will see this at the end of the age when evil is dealt with once and for all.

### **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

Matthew 13:31-32

Mark 4:30-32

Luke 13:18-19

Subject:

What does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the Kingdom of heaven?

Complement:

The Kingdom will have remarkable growth despite its humble beginnings

HI:

The Kingdom of Heaven will continue to grow

Introduction

The greatest debate in the history of mankind, what is the best condiment for a hot dog, ketchup or mustard?

What does this have to do with anything? You'll see.

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

The Kingdom of Heaven will continue to grow

#### 1. Mustard Seed

##### a. The Plant

- i. Yes – the plant where we have our wonderful condiment for hot dogs
- ii. As a seed it is regarded as one of the smallest
- iii. As the plant grows – it can reach up to 10 – 15 feet in height

The Kingdom of Heaven will continue to grow

#### 2. Understanding the Parable

- a. The Kingdom will have a small beginning
- b. Growth would be disproportionate to the small beginning
- c. Growth would bless the world

#### 3. Application

- a. Jesus tells his disciples they would be part of something that would grow exponentially and bless the world
- b. Idea of exponential growth – if one believer shares and brings another person to faith annually – that person brings another to faith annually - what is the exponential, mathematical growth?

### Conclusion

The potential for the Kingdom's growth is amazing; it is to serve as an encouragement for God's people and also serves as a reminder. Despite the small beginnings the Kingdom of God has grown become a great blessing to the world. This should be an encouragement for God's people. It reminds us that we are also called to participate in its growth and to do our part. The Kingdom of Heaven will continue to grow, are you involved?

### **The Parable of the Leaven**

Matthew 13:33

Luke 13:20-21

Subject:

What does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the Kingdom of heaven?

Complement:

The kingdom will have remarkable growth and permeate the world despite its humble beginnings

HI:

The Kingdom of Heaven will permeate the world.

#### Introduction

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Let me open with a question – what are some of the best smells?

The smell of – cooking bacon, freshly cut grass, baby smell (not the diaper smell), freshly baked bread.

I love the smell of freshly baked bread. Have you ever taken the time to really make bread? One of the most important ingredients to making bread soft and squishy is yeast. We're going to talk about that in a moment. But just a reminder we are talking about Jesus' parables. In quick succession Jesus tells two parables back to back. Last week we looked at the parable of the mustard seed and immediately after that Jesus tells us this parable.

#### 1. Background

##### a. What is leaven? Yeast

- i. Small amount of fermented dough used to ferment other dough
- ii. Once in the batch it permeates the whole batch – until it has risen

##### b. Imagery in the Bible

- i. Leaven was often seen as a corrupting influence
  - 1. Jesus warned of leaven of Pharisees and Sadducees – teaching and hypocrisy
  - 2. 1 Cor 5 – a little influences the whole
- ii. The image here in the parable is not meant to be negative

#### 2. Explanation of the Parable

##### a. The Kingdom of Heaven's growth, will permeate the world

- i. The loaf represents the world – the leaven the Kingdom – the kingdom will gradually make its influence felt in the world

- ii. Invisible growth of the kingdom – often unnoticeable but real
- b. The Kingdom's influence will be complete
  - i. 'Till it was all leavened' – all was affected
    - 1. Nothing will be untouched by the influence of the kingdom
- 3. Application of the Parable
  - a. The Kingdom of Heaven will permeate the world
    - i. Be encouraged
      - 1. Don't measure the growth or success of the kingdom by visible standards
      - 2. Spread is happening wherever the Word is being sown
      - 3. It will start small but its effects are disproportionate to its small growth
    - ii. Do your part

#### Conclusion

The Kingdom of Heaven will permeate the world, as a result as citizens of the Kingdom we are to take heart and to take part. Be encouraged to know that the Kingdom will permeate every facet of life. We may not see its growth or effects but we are assured it is happening.

## The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44

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**Subject:**

What does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the Kingdom of heaven?

**Complement:**

The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it

**HI:**

The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it

---

### Introduction

How many of you have ever been to an antique show? How about the art gallery? Garage sales? What do you think these things have in common? Many times we go to these places and we find things of value, but sometimes on the rare occasion you discover something of great value and worth. Some look at art and you say to yourself, "I can paint that", so why is that painting worth \$10000?

Today in our parable Jesus gives us insight into something that is of tremendous value and worth – the Kingdom of Heaven. We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

### 1. Understanding the Parable

- a. Details
  - i. A man finds a treasure, he recognizes its worth and he is willing to sell everything he has to buy the field where the treasure is hidden
- b. Meaning
  - i. The Kingdom has tremendous value to one who accidentally finds it
  - ii. The man is not purposely looking for it, he finds it and recognizes its value immediately

### 2. The Kingdom is of Exceeding Value

- a. Willing to sell everything he had and is left with absolutely nothing but the treasure

### Conclusion

Do you recognize the value of the Kingdom of Heaven? Are you willing to bankrupt yourself to just have this treasure of exceeding value and worth? Some of us recognize its value and are willing to pay the price. Still some of us will completely miss seeing its value like things at an antique show.

## The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

Matthew 13:45-46

**Subject:**

What does Jesus want his disciples to know about the Kingdom of Heaven?

**Complement:**

The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it

**Hi:**

The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it

### Introduction

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Last week we were looking at the parable that just preceded this one, the parable of the hidden treasure. The main idea of that sermon was the Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it. Today it will be no different. The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it.

#### 1. Understanding the Parable

##### a. Details

- i. A merchant seeking beautiful pearls, he finds a pearl of great price and he sells everything he has to obtain it

##### b. Meaning

- i. "again" – links to the preceding parable
  - 1. Value and preciousness of the Kingdom of Heaven
  - ii. The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it.
  - iii. Difference between the parables
    - 1. Hidden treasure - one finds it by accident
    - 2. Pearl - one who is searching for something of great value
  - iv. Sells everything to obtain it – willing to have nothing but the pearl

##### c. Clarify

- i. You cannot buy or earn the Kingdom of Heaven
- ii. What we are to see from the parable is the reactions to finding the Kingdom of Heaven

### Conclusion

The Kingdom of Heaven is of exceeding value that people are willing to give up everything to have it. The question we need to continue to consider is, is it worth it? Do we recognize it when we see it? Are we ready to have “worldly nothing” yet having “kingdom joy”?

## The Parable of the Net

Matthew 13:47-50

Subject:

What does Jesus want his disciples to understand about the Kingdom?

Complement:

The Kingdom of Heaven will have a present mixture and a future separation

Hi:

A future separation will occur and the issue of evil will be resolved

### Introduction

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

As we have been looking through the various parables I want you to notice some of the similarities and differences between some of them that we find in Matthew 13. We have seen the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven. Both of them talk about the growth and development of the kingdom of Heaven. One is noticeable and the other is invisible. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price we see that the Kingdom of Heaven is of great value, one finds it accidentally and the other has been seeking something of great value.

Today we will look at the parable of the Net. The parable to keep in the back of your mind is the parable of the weeds. In the parable of the weeds we learned that the issue of evil will be dealt with at the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. For the parable of the net Jesus provides a brief interpretation and reveals that a future separation will occur and the issue of evil will be resolved

#### 1. Explanation of the Parable

- a. The net cast is cast into the sea, the catch is brought to shore, those that were edible were saved and those inedible were thrown away
- b. Jesus gives us the explanation
  - i. Kingdom right now will have a mix of good and bad, the net catches both
  - ii. Future separation will occur and the issue of evil will be resolved
    - 1. Future separation by angels
      - a. At the end of the age
      - b. Punishment of the wicked

#### 2. Difference – between parable of the weeds and the parable of the net

- a. Parable of the weeds gives a description of why there is a mix of good and evil, and a blessing for the righteous

- b. Parables of the net – no description for the mixture of good and evil, no blessing is described for the righteous, only punishment for the wicked
- c. Parable of the Net – reinforces the truth – coming judgment and condemnation of wicked
  - i. a future separation will occur and the issue of evil will be resolved

3. Application of the Parable

- a. In the Kingdom the wicked will be judged
  - i. Warning of condemnation
- b. Wicked will be separated, cast into hell and tormented

#### Conclusion

There is good news and bad news about the Kingdom. The good news is that the issue of evil will be resolved at the end of the age and the beginning of the Kingdom. The bad news is if you follow the path of evil and wickedness there will be a final judgment and ultimate destruction. A future separation will occur and the issue of evil will be resolved.

## **The Parable of the Master of the House**

Matthew 13:51-52

**Subject:**

Jesus asks – have you understood all these things?

**Complement:**

Jesus provides instructions for those who have been given instructions regarding the Kingdom of Heaven

**HI**

Christ followers need to understand the value of the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Introduction**

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Today we are looking at a very short parable and it is also somewhat discreet. Have you ever mis-valued something? Maybe you went to get your car fixed and it costs a lot more than you expected. Perhaps it you recently had something appraised and discovered how much more it was actually worth. This parable today continues on that theme of recognizing the true value of the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ followers need to understand the value of the Kingdom of Heaven.

#### **1. Explanation of the Parable**

- a. A Scribe – is a person trained in writing skills and used to record events and decisions
  - i. More than a copyist, they were expected to understand the finer points of Mosaic Law
  - ii. Jesus states that scribes are instructed about Kingdom
- b. Like the master of the house
  - i. House with treasure, something of great value
  - ii. Treasure is new and old
    - 1. Old treasure – the law
    - 2. New treasure - is the Kingdom of Heaven

Christ followers need to understand the value of the Kingdom of Heaven.

#### **2. Application of the Parable**

- a. Every disciple is a scribe
  - i. As His disciples – understand the message and the value of the treasure
- b. Every disciple is like a Household with treasure
  - i. Treasure is Word of God we hold in our hearts

- c. Every disciple has old and new treasure
  - i. OT is important
  - ii. NT is important

#### Conclusion

Christ followers need to understand the value of the Kingdom of Heaven. Do we truly understand the value of being citizens of the Kingdom, of belonging to the Kingdom or have we mis-valued it and thus we live our life according to this misplaced value we have put on the Kingdom?

## The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

**Subject:**

What does a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven look like?

**Complement:**

The citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven recognizes how much forgiveness they have received and in turn offers forgiveness to others.

**HI**

Those who have been forgiven much, forgive much

**Introduction:**

In the beginning, when God created man, he said it was not good for man to be alone. Since the beginning God had created us to be relational beings. We were designed to have relationship with God and with one another. All of us here, we each have a relationship to one another. Each of us were born into relationships.

In relationships we will encounter tensions, wrongs, lies, broken trust. Since we are imperfect people, we are bound to have trouble in our relationships. If you and I want to have relationships that last for the long haul, then we must be willing to extend forgiveness to others. Here's another way to say it: In every relationship you have, you will constantly be called on to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.

Since we are imperfect people, we are bound to have trouble with forgiveness. I am convinced that relationships are built not on a standard of perfection but on our ability to ask for forgiveness and upon our willingness to extend forgiveness. As a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven we need to remember those who have been forgiven much, forgive much.

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

### 1. Explanation of the Parable

#### a. Context

- i. Peter asks a question about forgiveness
- ii. The teaching of the time was forgiving a person 3 times was enough
- iii. Jesus answers and gives this parable to emphasize how frequently we are called to forgive

#### b. The Parable

- i. A King shows mercy by cancelling a huge debt

1. 10 000 talents – approx 3 billion – a debt that can never be repaid
  - ii. A King goes beyond the request of the servant
    1. Request: be patient so I can repay the debt, the King forgave it entirely
  - iii. Servant refuses to cancel the debt of a fellow servant
    1. 100 talents – about 5000
    2. The servant uses the same phrases but is thrown in jail
  - iv. The King hears about what has happened and called the servant back
    1. King punishes the servant and adds to it
2. Failure to forgive will bring severe punishment
  - a. Because we have been forgiven much we must extend forgiveness to those who hurt us
    - i. We are indebted to God
    - ii. We cannot pay what is owed
    - iii. Christ's atoning sacrifice, the debt is paid
    - iv. What we owe God is more than what others owe to us
    - v. Unforgiveness results in punishment

Those who have been forgiven much, forgive much

### 3. How to Forgive

- a. Focus on God's forgiveness of you, allow God to help you forgive
- b. If you wronged someone: Face to face, own the wrong, ask for forgiveness
- c. If someone wronged you: face to face, point out the wrong, give forgiveness

### Conclusion

We're a lot like the unforgiving man in the story that Jesus told. We stand before a holy God with our sins piled up higher than Mount Everest. Our sins are like a \$6 billion debt that we can never repay. And yet, out of compassion for our moral predicament, and motivated by His grace, God sent His Son Jesus to pay off our spiritual debts.

We can tolerate those who irritate us, and forgive our friends and family members when they wrong us, precisely because Jesus has forgiven us. Since those of us who have received Christ as our Saviour have been forgiven for so much, then, out of gratitude, we should practice unlimited forgiveness in all our relationships.

Those who have been forgiven much, forgive much.

C.S. Lewis has said, "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." – The Weight of Glory.

## The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

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**Subject:**

What does Jesus want his disciples to know about the kind of heart a kingdom person should have?

**Complement:**

Envy has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven because God is fair and just and no one can question his generosity.

**HI:**

Because of God's generosity and fairness, envy has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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### Introduction

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

What's so amazing about Grace? It has been said that Christianity is a religion of grace but too often grace is not understood and is often too good to be true. We use the word a lot but we rarely think about what it means.

Grace teaches us that God does for others what we would never do for them. Grace is a gift that costs everything to the giver and nothing to the receiver. It is given to those who don't deserve it, barely recognize it, and hardly appreciate it. That's why God alone gets the glory in your salvation. Jesus did all the work when he died on the cross.

Because of God's generosity and fairness, envy has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

#### 1. Explanation of the Parable

##### a. Context

- i. Jesus rebukes the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, Jesus teaches us how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of Heaven
- ii. Key statement is made: "first will be last, and the last first"
- iii. We find the parable between these two phrases

##### b. Details of the Parable

- i. Morning – landowners hire workers for an agreed wage
- ii. Later – hires more workers for unspecified wage
- iii. End of the day – both are paid equally for their work – which causes conflict with the workers who worked all day
- iv. Landowner responds that all were treated fairly and he is generous

## 2. Application of the Parable

- a. First workers – represent the apostles and others called by Christ early in life
  - i. They may labour longer and harder in the vineyard – the Kingdom
- b. Other workers - those who are called by Christ at various times afterwards
  - i. Some are called later and do not have opportunity to do as much for the Lord
- c. Everyone receives what is fair
  - i. Because of God's generosity and fairness, envy has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.
  - ii. This is not a parable about those who put off receiving Christ until the last moment
    - 1. The workers were late because no one hired them – not because they kept turning down the offer of work earlier

Because of God's generosity and fairness, envy has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

### Conclusion

When we enter the Kingdom there will be no contest to see who is most deserving of God's grace. He has assured us of his generosity and fairness. Amazing grace – indeed – lets sing that together. Because of God's generosity and fairness, envy has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

## APPENDIX D

### **Supplemental: Sermon Outlines for Future Use**

#### **The Parable of the Two Sons**

Matthew 21:28-32

##### Subject

What kind of person will enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

##### Complement

Jesus tells us that a person who does the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven

##### HI

Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven

##### Introduction

Growing up I vividly remember my mother saying to me the following (and for many mothers here, you've heard the same), "Ken, go clean your room". My response was simple, "okay". That's not the end of the story. The question is, did I listen and/or did I obey? I heard my mother, I listened well, but listening was not complete until there was obedience. Later when my mother would yell out, "ACTION!!!!!!", you knew whether or not I was listening.

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Parables were not only used to tell us about the Kingdom of Heaven but also to challenge the religious leaders of that time about their misconceptions of that Kingdom. Here we have a parable that Jesus shares that challenges his opposition.

His main challenge is to rebuke the religious leaders that those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

#### 1. Explanation of the Parable

- a. Man has 2 sons and a vineyard
- b. The man instructs his sons to go to work in the vineyard
  - i. First son says no, but later changes his mind and goes

- ii. Other son says yes, but did not actually go.
- c. Context
  - i. Jesus is questioned by the religious leaders regarding his authority
  - ii. Jesus responds with this parable
    - 1. Who did the will of the Father – obviously the first son
      - a. Tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of Heaven before the religious leaders
      - b. The religious leaders were like the 2nd son
    - iii. Gospel of Luke expands the Parable
      - 1. Those who accepted John's message of repentance and baptism were justified
      - 2. The religious leaders who reject John were rejecting God
  - 2. Application of the Parable
    - a. Be doers of the will of God – not just sayers
      - i. those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
    - b. Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of obedience (Authentic Christianity – John Stott)
    - c. Clarify obedience is not legalism or salvation by works
      - i. Keeping commandments is a response to God's saving work
      - ii. Cheap grace leads to easy believism leads to sayers not doers

Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

### Conclusion

How many here believe that if you say you are going to do something, you better do it. We know this as following through. It really is a challenge how we finish a race. Think about some of the great Bible characters. Moses was an abandoned baby and became a great leader. David was a shepherd boy out in the fields and became a great King. Saul started out killing Christians and ended up penning many of the great doctrines of the Christian faith and the list goes on. There were also others who started well but finished poorly such as Judas Iscariot. Many times in the church we are guilty of getting people started in the faith but not helping them finish. Some Christians will burn out and drop out and fall away before the end of the race. Let us learn to finish well. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Parable of the Wicked Tenants**

Matthew 21:33-46

**Subject**

What does Jesus want his opposition to know about their rejection of him?

**Complement**

The opponents of Jesus will have the Kingdom of God taken from them and given to those who produce fruits.

**HI**

The Kingdom of God will be taken from those who carry out their own agendas and will be given to those who produce the fruit that God wants.

**Introduction**

Have you ever “lost” something that “belonged” to you? Of course – but let me explain what I mean a little bit further.

When I was younger playing hockey – I had such a good year that I thought I was going to win the most valuable player for my team. At the year-end banquet there I was waiting for my name to be called for the MVP for my team, and then someone else was announced. I was angry and furious and I had to applaud like those movie stars you see at the Oscars with the gracious loser face. I was robbed, that trophy was mine, and how could this be? In retrospect, how foolish, it was never mine to begin with. I did not own or have the right to that trophy. It never belonged to me in the first place.

Here we have a parable that gives us a similar picture of how sometimes we think something belongs to us and we are furious when we don’t get receive it.

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

The context is that Jesus was being questioned by the religious opponents and last week we looked at the parable of the two sons.

1. Explanation of the Parable

- a. Vineyard – represents Israel
- b. Landowner – represents God
  - i. Protects the vineyard with fence, provides for the vineyard with tower to watch and store things, wants production from the vineyard
- c. The Wicked Tenants – represent Israel’s leaders
  - i. Chief priests, scribes, elders and their followers

- ii. They are responsible to the landowner, they are to be stewards of what is entrusted to them and at the end they are to give it back to the landowner
- iii. Problem – they want the vineyard for their own purposes not the landowner's
- d. Servants sent to the vineyard on behalf of the Landowner – represents the prophets
  - i. Israel rejected many prophets
    - 1. Rejected, beaten, stoned, ridiculed, put to death
- e. Landowner's Son – Jesus
  - i. Response to the son was to kill him so they could inherit the land for themselves
  - f. Jesus raises the question – what will the landowner do to the tenants?

The Kingdom of God will be taken from those who carry out their own agendas and will be given to those who produce the fruit that God wants.

## 2. Application of the Parable

- a. God has entrusted to us many things – are we likely to produce the fruits that He desires or are we seeking our own selfish desires
  - i. We abuse graces more often than not
- b. Jesus is the rightful heir – he will reject those that reject him
  - i. Can fall on the stone (Christ) and be broken and healed (broken to sin)
  - ii. Can have the stone fall on you and completely crush you

The Kingdom of God will be taken from those who carry out their own agendas and will be given to those who produce the fruit that God wants.

### Conclusion

This parable is a stern warning for all of us not to get complacent about doing the work of the Kingdom. The warning is stark that if we become complacent or disobedient our place can be given to someone else who is doing the Kingdom's work.

Everything we have is a gift from God, your house, your paycheck, your investments, your time all belongs to God, and we are merely stewards, caretakers. Let us ensure that we are obedient and fruitful lest we be condemned like the religious leaders of Jesus' day. The Kingdom of God will be taken from those who carry out their own agendas and will be given to those who produce the fruit that God wants.

**Parable of the Wedding Feast**

Matthew 22:1-14

**Subject**

What does Jesus want his opponents to know about the Kingdom of Heaven

**Complement**

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding feast where many are called, but few are chosen

**HI**

Many are invited to the Kingdom of Heaven but few are chosen to remain

**Introduction**

Allow me to share with you a very funny story that happened between my friend and I the other day. Joe is a good friend of mine and he was very excited because in this coming year he is going to get married. Now back when I got married my wife and I picked a date and a few months before the wedding we sent out our wedding invitations and asked for an RSVP. Nowadays I guess more and more people are busy now they send out a pre-emptive invitation called: "Save the Date". It's not the official invitation but a request for you to save that particular date for this couple. Joe took it one step further – he asked for an RSVP for the Save the Date and then later he and his fiancé will send out another invitation with an RSVP official. Confused yet? Me too.

So I ran into Joe and he was excited and happy and had a bounce in his step. He saw me from afar at the grocery store and came running towards me with excitement. "Ken, Ken – did you get my STD?" AH!!!!!! Out loud, in the grocery store, in front of complete strangers. I said, "excuse me?", others began to giggle and laugh. Joe repeated himself, "did you get my STD, my Save the Date?" I laughed so hard and what was even funnier was the innocence of Joe – he did not know that STD also stood for "sexually transmitted disease". Oh brother.

Anyhow, we all receive invitations to various events. RSVP's are necessary to determine the approximate number of guests who will be attending. Sometimes you are limited in spacing, other times you don't want to pay more than you have to. But sometimes people just never respond to an RSVP, what if they show up without warning.

Well let's look at an invitation that God gives and see how various people RSVP God.

Again the context is that this parable continues from the previous parables we saw for the last two weeks, the parable of the two sons and the parable of the tenants. Both were in the context that Jesus is addressing his opposition and those who were out to get him.

Many are invited to the Kingdom of Heaven but few are chosen to remain

### 1. Explanation of the Parable

- a. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding feast
  - i. Here we have an image figurative to the future kingdom age
- b. Invitation went out
  - i. People were obligated to come because of the authority of the king
  - ii. People were rebellious, indifferent, even abuse the King's messengers
- c. King's Reaction
  - i. Those who reject the invitation and abuse his servants are destroyed
- d. Invitation is extended to others - both good and bad
  - i. To enjoy the blessing of the Kingdom of God
- e. Guests with incorrect clothing
  - i. Though others were invited – proper attire was still expected and provided by the king
  - ii. Guests without wedding attire – disrespectful to the host
- f. King's Reaction
  - i. The king is insulted and they are thrown out
- g. Jesus concludes by saying the invitation of God is extended to many, but few are chosen

Many are invited to the Kingdom of Heaven but few are chosen to remain

### 2. Application of the Parable

- a. Rejecting the King's Invitation
  - i. Indifference
  - ii. Rebelliousness
- b. Rejecting the King's Messengers
  - i. Word of God
  - ii. God's people
- c. Rejecting the King's Provision
  - i. Thinking we are self-sufficient
  - ii. Clothing ourselves in our own righteousness
  - iii. Having our own terms and conditions for God
- d. Rejecting the King

Many are invited to the Kingdom of Heaven but few are chosen to remain

### Conclusion

Some of us here have a total disregard for the invitation of God, the messengers of God, the provision of God and even the Son of God. Some of us are unwilling to

RSVP God and still some of us have and we continue to do things according to our own righteousness and our own garments.

Altar Call

**Parable of Wise and Foolish Virgins**

Matthew 25:1-13

**Subject**

What does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the coming Kingdom of God?

**Complement**

The disciples are instructed to be watchful and prepared because no one knows when the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven will occur.

**HI**

We are called to be watchful and ready because no one knows when the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven will occur.

**Introduction**

Let me paint a picture for you about an upcoming wedding.

The groom is more important than the bride and in fact the bride had paid for all the expense of the wedding. The formal engagement came first, which was arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. The groom settled on a purchase price with her parents and the marriage covenant was established. From that moment they were regarded as husband and wife even though the ceremony or sexual intimacy had not yet taken place. The groom left his bride to go back to his father's house and prepare a place for them both to live, which was usually about a year. After that period of separation, the groom would come unexpectedly (usually at night) to take his bride to their new home. The groom and his entourage would process from his home towards the home of the bride and the bride would not know what day he is coming. She and her entourage had to be ready because he would arrive at night and they needed to have a light source like a lamp. The grooms' arrival was preceded by a shout and she would suddenly depart with her groom. The marriage ceremony would begin and would last for 7 days with a great feast and party.

It's a far different picture from our weddings today.

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry. Today we are looking at a parable describing the consummation of the kingdom of heaven – when Jesus returns.

We are called to be watchful and ready because no one knows when the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven will occur.

1. Explanation of the Parable

- a. 10 virgins go out with lamps to wait for the arrival of the groom
  - i. 5 foolish take no oil

- ii. 5 wise take extra oil
- b. Groom is delayed in coming
- c. Arrival is announced – virgins trimmed their lamps
  - i. Foolish the oil is running out?
  - ii. Plead with wise to share oil
  - iii. Wise ones refuse because there is not enough
  - iv. Foolish ones go to get some oil
- d. While away the groom arrives and the wise one go with him to the wedding and the door is shut
- e. Foolish arrive but are not allowed in

## 2. Meaning of the Parable

- a. Jesus instructs us to be watchful, no one knows when Jesus will return
- b. We are called to be watchful and ready because no one knows when the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven will occur.

## 3. Application of the Parable

- a. Believers are like the waiting virgins
  - i. Some are wise and prepared for Jesus' coming
  - ii. Some are foolish and unprepared
- b. We are called to be watchful and ready because no one knows when the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven will occur.
  - i. Unprepared – there is no second chance
  - ii. Be ready

We are called to be watchful and ready because no one knows when the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven will occur.

### Conclusion

Yesterday I was playing a common and familiar game with my girls, Hide and Seek. I'm sure you're all familiar with it. One person is "it", and everyone else hides. The person who is "it" counts to 20 and at the end of the countdown – what are the words you say? "Ready or not, here I come." I envision Jesus as some point saying these exact same words the moment he arrives to consummate the Kingdom. "Ready or not, here I come". Are you ready?

**Parable of the Talents**

Matthew 25:14-30

**Subject**

What does Jesus want his disciples to learn about the coming Kingdom of God?

**Complement**

When Jesus returns to fully establish the Kingdom he was ask what we have done with the things he has entrusted to us.

**HI**

Diligence is rewarded, negligence is punished.

**Introduction**

Growing up I had a friend who was moving away temporarily for about 5 years. I remember the day she was moving and she gave to me one of her most trusted toys, a stuffed dog. She asked me to take care of it and keep it safe and then to remember her. I did so. I remember keeping that stuffed dog on my bed. Making sure it was cleaned if it got dirty. Ensuring that nothing every bad happened to it. During that time I treated that toy as if it were my own. Eventually my friend returned after about 7 years and by that time I had grown fond of the toy. When she saw it in my room, she asked to have it back.

I remember the sense of dread. It was my toy, I had it for the last 7 years, I played with, took care of it, cleaned it, made sure it was in good working order. I developed a relationship with it, and now you want it back? There was a sense of loss the day she took her toy back.

Our parable today has a similar feel to it. It's the parable of the Talents. Now for those of you who are familiar with this parable let me give a word of caution. The parable is not a question about what are you doing with your talents – ie. Your skills, abilities, giftings per se, but moreso what are you doing with the things God has entrusted to you. Diligence is rewarded, negligence is punished. We are entrusted with things from God and when God asks for them back – how will you respond?

The context of the parable follows the wise and foolish virgins that we looked at last week. This parable speaks to a future Kingdom of heaven, the anticipation of Jesus' return. In the parable of the ten virgins we are instructed that being prepared and watchful is essential during this time. Today we will see that being productive and diligent is also necessary during this time before the Kingdom comes in its fullness.

Diligence is rewarded, negligence is punished.

1. Explanation of the Parable.

- a. A man, travelled to far country and gives something to his servants

- i. Talent – monetary, about 20 years wages
- ii. Given to each - according to his ability
  - 1. Two made use of the talent
  - 2. One hid the money
- b. The man returns after a “long” time
  - i. Two doubled their gift – the master was excited
  - ii. One makes excuses – master called him wicked/lazy

Diligence is rewarded, negligence is punished.

## 2. Application of the Parable

- a. Be faithful in using what God has given you
- b. Diligence is rewarded – negligence is punished

### Conclusion

When Jesus returns and the question arises – what have you done with that I have entrusted you with? How will you respond? Your response to that question will also prompt a response from Jesus.

Will you hear “well done, good and faithful servant”? Or will the harsh words summarize your life “you wicked and lazy servant”. Let us remember that God has entrusted many things to us, Diligence is rewarded, and negligence is punished.

## **Parable of the Growing Seed**

Mark 4:26-29

Subject:

What does Jesus reveal about the Kingdom of God?

Compliment:

The Kingdom of God will produce a harvest.

Hi:

Growth is mysteriously produced until the time of the harvest.

### Introduction

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Many of the parables we have seen have come from the gospel of Matthew with a few that you can find in other gospel narratives. Our parable today is found only in the gospel of Mark.

This parable is found between the parable of the sower and the mustard seed in the gospel of Mark.

How many of you have done the following in your own home? Someone significant in your home you have a wall or a door frame where you have marked the height of your children, anyone? Why do we do that? Well yes it is fun, it shows our children how tall they are growing, but also it shows you that tangibly your children are growing physically and that is a sign that everyone is healthy. Our parable today also talks about growth but there is a difference. Growth is important when it comes to the Kingdom of God. Growth is mysteriously produced until the time of the harvest.

#### 1. Explanation of the Parable

- a. What this parable reveals about the kingdom of God
  - i. Word of God produces fruit
    - 1. Seed is not identified as the Word of God – but contextually – the Sower the link can be made
  - ii. Growth produced by the word
    - 1. Mysterious
      - a. Growth is beyond comprehension
    - 2. Process
      - a. Not all at once
      - b. Step by step – blade, head, full grain
  - iii. Growth until the harvest
- b. Compare the Sower

- i. Sower emphasizes human responsibility
  - 1. Seed did not produce unless it fell in good soil
- ii. Growth is mysteriously produced until the time of the harvest.
  - 1. Growing seed – stresses divine power
  - 2. The seed itself can germinate, grow
  - 3. Parable emphasizes trust that the Word has power to grow

2. Application of the Parable

- a. Growth is mysteriously produced until the time of the harvest.
  - i. Word of God is a powerful seed
  - ii. 2 things about the powerful seed
    - 1. Receiving it – growth of the kingdom in our lives
    - 2. Sow it – growth of the kingdom in the world

#### Conclusion

It is a stark reminder that as part of the Kingdom of God we are laborers but the results of our work depend solely on God. That serves as a reminder for how we share the gospel, how we confront sin, how we make disciples, our responsibility is to share the seed – the Word of God, the results, the growth, the change is mysteriously produced until the time of the harvest.

## **Parable of Taking the Lowest Place**

Luke 14:7-11

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**Subject:**

What characteristic does Jesus want his disciples and the Pharisees to value as a citizen of the Kingdom of God?

**Compliment:**

One of the most important characteristics of a citizen of the Kingdom of God is humility.

**HI:**

Those who exalt themselves will be made low, those who humble themselves will be exalted

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### **Introduction**

We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Opening visual illustration. Setup 6 chairs in the sanctuary facing away from the congregation. On the back of each chair are the numbers listed 1-6. Invite someone to come up and instruct them. You are important, you need to sit in the chair that represents that. Gently nudge them to #1. Invite 4 others up. You know there is a VIP sitting up here. You need to sit as close to them as possible. Maybe they're a great business man and you want to pitch your idea, maybe they are a celebrity and you want to be able to take selfies with them all night long. Go ahead and find your seat. Most will sit 2-5. Uh Oh, I didn't realize but someone really important just showed up. As a good host I can't put them in the lowest seat (point to #6). I'm going to have to move someone - #2. Move them from #2 to #6. Is that fair? Of course, it's my party, my rules. Turn to #6 - I'm sorry, how does that make you feel?

Thanks – please go have a seat.

Well Jesus is sitting at a house watching the musical chairs as people trip over one another and themselves to sit in the best seat. Jesus has a challenging reminder for his disciples and even his opposition. Those who exalt themselves will be made low, those who humble themselves will be exalted.

#### **1. Setting**

- a. Jesus is eating at the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees and on the Sabbath
- b. They watch him closely – will he heal the man on the sabbath?
- c. Jesus poses a question about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath
  - i. They did not respond
  - ii. They could not respond –

1. Jesus healed
2. Questions their inconsistency
- d. Jesus is watching them closely
  - i. Notes how they are seated – taking the best seats
- e. Jesus gives the parable

2. Explanation of the Parable
  - a. Wedding feast – common social event
  - b. Warning about sitting down in the best place
    - i. Someone more honorable may have been invited
      1. When they arrived – you'll be displaced
      2. With shame you will move to the lowest place – the only place left
  - c. Therefore:
    - i. Sit in the lowest place – the host will come and invite you to sit higher
    - ii. Instead of shame – you will receive glory
    - iii. Those who exalt themselves will be made low, those who humble themselves will be exalted
3. Application of the Parable
  - a. Danger of pride
  - b. Importance of humility
  - c. Be humble

Those who exalt themselves will be made low, those who humble themselves will be exalted

#### Conclusion

Humility is what God wants, however it is not popular in our culture today. Those who exalt themselves will be made low, those who humble themselves will be exalted

**Parable of the Great Supper**

Luke 14:15-24

**Subject:**

What does Jesus want his hearers to know about who will be a part of the future Kingdom of God?

**Compliment:**

Jesus tells us that the kingdom will be filled, but many of those originally invited will be excluded

**HI:**

The Kingdom of God will be filled and those who accept the invitation will surprise us.

**Introduction**

I was sitting in at wedding reception in one of the banquet halls that had many different banquet rooms. I left my table to go to the restroom. As I made my way back I was distracted by a phone call from my mother who was looking after our children. One of my kids was sick and so she was updating me and I was giving her some instructions about medications. As I sat back in my seat I suddenly looked up and was shocked. Who are these people? When did you get invited to this wedding? I looked at the room, who were these people? After a while I realized, I'm in the wrong banquet hall. I laugh, the people around my table laughed, I proceeded out the door to the proper room.

Jesus is at a party and he is telling the people there, don't be surprised by who will show up at the party when the Kingdom of God comes to fruition. The Kingdom of God will be filled and those who accept the invitation will surprise us.

**1. Setting**

- a. Jesus is eating at the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees
- b. He shares a parable about humility directed towards the Pharisees
- c. He shares this parable about hospitality directed towards the Host

**2. Explanation of the Parable**

- a. Man gives great supper and gives out invitations
- b. Those invited begin to make excuses
  - i. Other priorities
- c. Master gets angry and finds others to attend

The Kingdom of God will be filled and those who accept the invitation will surprise us.

**3. Application**

- a. Symbolic of a time after the resurrection
  - i. Blessing of the kingdom of God in eternity is often a feast or banquet
- b. Jews invited and then the Gentiles
  - i. Not all accept the invitation
  - ii. Do we have excuses – business, family
    - 1. Misplaced priorities
- c. The Kingdom of God will be filled and those who accept the invitation will surprise us.

**Parable of the Minas**

Luke 19:11-27

Subject:

What does Jesus teach about the coming Kingdom of God?

Compliment:

The disciples need to remain faithful until Jesus returns and the Kingdom of God is consummated.

Hi:

Be faithful in our service as we wait for the Lord's return.

## Introduction

This is the final sermon in our series. We are in a series of sermons looking at the Parables of Jesus. More specifically we are looking at the parables that describe the Kingdom of God (Heaven) which is the central message of Jesus' earthly ministry.

This parable has many similarities to another parable we have already seen, the parable of the Talents. The setting and the details are slightly different but the main idea is similar. Be faithful in our service as we wait for the Lord's return.

## 1. Setting

- a. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem just before His triumphal entry
- b. Taught to correct misunderstandings about the Kingdom of God
  - i. As Some thought the Kingdom of God would appear immediately
  - ii. Overthrow the government

## 2. Explanation of the Parable

- a. Nobleman going away to receive a kingdom and return
- b. Call 10 servants
  - i. Given a mina (3 months wages)
  - ii. Commanded: "Do business until I return"
- c. Citizens send delegation to express their displeasure with the reign of the nobleman
- d. Noblemen receives his kingdom and returns
  - i. Calls for servants
    - 1. One earned 10 minas – given 10 cities
    - 2. One earned 5 minas – given 5 cities
    - 3. One return the original mina – noblemen is angered and it is given to the one who earned 10
    - 4. Some object - noblemen responds
      - a. They are destroyed

Jesus gives us a reminder to be faithful in our service as we wait for the Lord's return.

### 3. Application of the Parable

- a. Kingdom of God would not appear immediately
  - i. Jesus would go away to receive the kingdom (ascension)
  - ii. During his absence people will reject Jesus' reign
  - iii. Role of the disciples while he is away
    - 1. Be productive
    - 2. Be faithful
      - a. Be faithful in our service as we wait for the Lord's return.
  - iv. Punishment for those who do not submit to the king

### Conclusion

Jesus has not yet returned. We are currently living between vs. 14 and 15, our King is absent and the fullness of the Kingdom of God has not totally come. For some of us that we lose sight of the fact that He will return. Some of us become complacent while waiting, some of us maintain an urgency to be faithful in our service.

The best investment we can make with our life is to use what God has given us to bring honor and glory to the Father. This approach can lead us through many of the dangers of life; it can help us to share in the blessings of God, but it will lead us to the indescribable joy of hearing the Father's "Well Done".

Be faithful in our service as we wait for the Lord's return.

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